Winter 2003

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A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

The Search for Dragonslayers

Who can tame urban school systems?

JAY MATHEWS • ALEXANDER RUSSO • KENNETH WONG

IN THIS ISSUE:

What Happened in Chicago, Fracas in Philadelphia, How to Reform Special Ed, Charters Beset, Milton Friedman Speaks, The Religion of Public Schooling

CONTRIBUTORS: CHARLES GLENN, CLAUDIA GOLDIN, BRYAN HASSEL, BRIAN JACOB, PEARL ROCK KANE, BRUNO MANNO, ROBERT MARANTO, PATRICK WOLF, RUD & ANN TURNBULL

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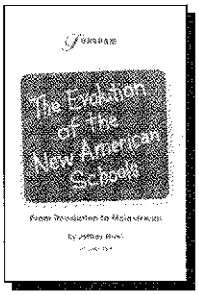

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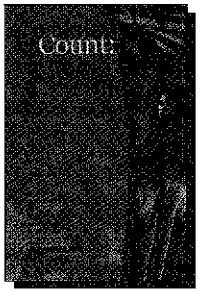

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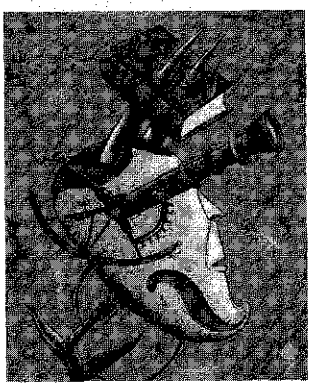

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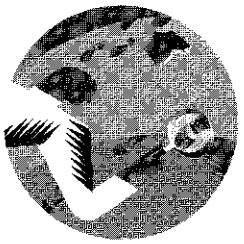

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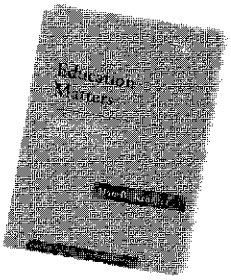

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The Urban Education Dragon

Can the next generation of superintendents tame big-city schools?

Few urban school superintendents remain in place for long nowadays. According to the Council of the Great City Schools, they last an average of 2.5 years. Like mythological children sent to appease the ravening monster, the chief education officers are ready sacrifices offered up when things go badly. Replacing the person nominally in charge is a short-term fix that helps spare the powers that be—often the school board and the mayor—from facing the reality that profound changes are needed.

What, exactly, is the urban education dragon? Disorderly, dangerous schools. Rules, regulations, and red tape. Union contracts that block reform of the system and make it harder to employ top-notch teachers and principals. And municipal politics, often a dragon's tail that can whip around and smack you at any moment. All of which conspire to depress student achievement.

In most big American cities, the pro-child constituency is tiny. The kids in school, those who face the dragon's fire on a daily basis, don't vote. Most of the adults who do cast ballots have no children in school. Vendors, contractors, bureaucrats, and employees thus wield great power, as they are deeply interested in and fully informed about what is happening. But they are far more apt to oppose reform than to favor it. No wonder superintendents get eaten alive.

In most big American cities, the pro-child constituency is tiny.

Yet both **Alexander Russo** and **Kenneth Wong**, in complementary accounts, reveal Paul Vallas to be an accomplished dragon tamer. As head of the Chicago Public Schools, he compiled an impressive track record. What was once chaotic is now more orderly, and, as **Brian Jacob**'s research suggests, students seem to be moving ahead educationally.

After a better-than-expected run at the Illinois governorship, Vallas is now back in the dragon's lair, this time in Philadelphia. Sometimes called the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia can hardly apply that moniker to its woeful school system and treacherous politics. Philadelphia's education behemoth is well described in **Jay Mathews**'s account of the struggle between entrenched forces and Edison Schools, the country's best-known for-profit school manager.

Edison also figures prominently in the competition between independent mom-and-pop charter schools and the sleeker national education-management companies. In our opening forum, **Bryan Hassel** judges that both kinds of charters are vital to the charter-school movement. That movement, **Bruce Manno** tells us, must now deal with both inner weaknesses and increasingly hostile opponents. The latter include (but are not limited to) the teacher unions, one of which—the American Federation of Teachers—recently issued an account of research on charter schools that, says **Robert Maranto**, lacks balance and accuracy.

Charter schools recall a time when the American education landscape was populated by tens of thousands of independent school districts. Within this decentralized system, **Claudia Goldin** reveals, localities were able to build schools, attract students, and mobilize political and financial support with an abandon that Europeans could only envy. Now, however, the need to address issues of educational quality and performance may call for new rules and new institutions.

The same spirit of opportunity led to one of American public education's noblest efforts: the inclusion of disabled youngsters in the mainstream of school life. Federal legislation signed by Gerald Ford in 1975 built the foundation of what we now know as special education. How well is it working in 2003? In our second forum, **Rud** and **Ann Turnbull** suggest that the problems lie with schools' failure to adhere to the laws that are on the books. **Patrick Wolf** suggests that the laws themselves need to change.

In the wake of the recent Supreme Court ruling that found Cleveland's voucher program to be constitutional, two features are worthy of note. **Charles Glenn** explains that public schools often propagate their beliefs with as much zealotry as any parochial school. And **Pearl Rock Kane** asks nonagenarian **Milton Friedman**, the father of the modern voucher movement, to reflect on the progress of his idea. A book review and **Carol Jago**'s reflections on her experiences as an English teacher round out this issue of *Education Next*. We hope you enjoy it.

-THE EDITORS

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

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Testing the GED

In his article on the high-school graduation rate ("Tassels on the Cheap," Feature, Fall 2002), Duncan Chaplin implies that the General Educational Development (GED) tests represent a lower academic hurdle than graduating from high school. He is simply wrong.

To earn a GED, candidates must pass five separate tests covering math, science, reading, writing, and social studies. The score necessary to pass does not reflect a minimum level of academic achievement; in fact, the passing standard is now set so that 40 percent of all high-school graduates would fail the test.

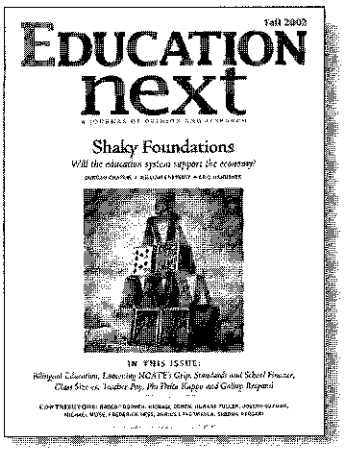
The GED is designed to document whether a student has mastered a level of knowledge roughly comparable to that of high-school graduates. It makes no promises about lifetime earnings, participation in postsecondary education, or job satisfaction. No test would ever make such promises. But what it purports to do, the GED does very well.

The GED Testing Service (a program of the American Council on Education) strongly encourages students to stay in school and graduate. For many, however, this may not be an option. For them, the GED tests offer an academically rigorous second chance.

MICHEL BAER
American Council on Education
Washington, D.C.

Duncan Chaplin responds: I agree that the GED provides an important second chance to adults without a regular degree. However, equating the GED with a regular degree does a great disservice to teenagers, since GED recipients are far less likely to complete college and earn far less on the labor market than those with regular degrees.

Even Baer's claim that GED recipients have similar academic skills is highly suspect. It is true that a random sample of high-school seniors who were likely to graduate were given a



GED, and 40 percent did not pass. However, unlike actual GED recipients, none of this random sample had an incentive to pass, took it multiple times, or prepared for the test. The fact that many did not pass is hardly surprising.

Margin of error

Dale Ballou ("Sizing Up Test Scores," Forum, Summer 2002) sounds legitimate warnings about some potential problems associated with using value-added assessment as a way of evaluating schools and teachers. However, if appropriate analytical strategies are used, value-added assessment need not pose the dire risks that his article implies.

First, Ballou overstates the risk to value-added assessment that comes from the question of whether or not scales can be developed with equal intervals. There is no unanimity of opinion on this subject within the psychometric community, as the article implies. There is one school of thought that says equal-unit scales can be developed and used. However, whether a "pure and perfect" equal-unit scale exists is not the critical question. The question should instead be, "If scales from a testing regime are used within a value-added process, is there evidence that measures of student progress are influenced by the distribution of student achievement levels in schools or classrooms because of a lack of equal-interval scales?" After appropriate analytical investigation, if evidence arises that measures of student progress are indeed influenced by positions on the scales, then statistical accommodation would be required within the value-added modeling process. I agree with Ballou's warning. However, I suggest that, if the empirical evidence points to a problem, there are appropriate analytical solutions to the problem.

Those who do not possess some basic statistical knowledge can easily misconstrue the part of the article that asserts that measures of gain innately have more noise than raw scores. A very basic statistical fact is: the variance of a difference between two variables is equal to the sum of the variances minus two times the covariance between the two variables. This is why, in our modeling efforts, we do massive multivariate, longitudinal analyses in order to exploit the covariance structure of student data over grades and subjects to dampen the errors of measurement in individual student test scores. This leads to an improved ability to distinguish the effectiveness of various schools and teachers. However, even with the most sophisticated statistical approaches, for some subjects and grades the ability to differentiate among educators may allow only a small number of schools and teachers to be identified as being different from the average educator. This should not be considered an obstacle to the deployment of value-added measures as a component of teacher and school evaluations, but as an attribute that allows the data to be used consistent with the reliability of the indicators that can be gleaned from them.

Ballou's cautions are appropriate. However, they do not lead to the judgment that value-added assessment for purposes of evaluating teachers and schools is invalid.

WILLIAM L. SANDERS
SAS Institute, Inc.
Cary, N.C.

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Dale Ballou responds: Responses to my article on value-added assessment suggest that it may be useful to put my arguments in a broader context.

Because test scores are noisy measures of true achievement, the quality of the information in these scores varies from teacher to teacher. In a letter published in the Fall 2002 issue, J.E. Stone alludes to ways of minimizing noise, but those statistical adjustments, which are used in the most sophisticated value-added assessments, have the consequences I described in my article: a teacher's rating will depend on the subject she teaches, how large her classes are, how long she has been in the current system—in short, any factors that affect the quality and quantity of the available data. Some outcomes will be difficult for teachers to understand. For example, the test scores of Mr. Jones's students may rise more than the test scores of Ms. Smith's, but Ms. Smith, not Mr. Jones, may be recognized for excellence—because the state possesses better information about Ms. Smith. As long as the purpose of the system is purely diagnostic, these disparities are unlikely to cause much dissatisfaction. But when rewards and sanctions are attached, they will probably become a major issue.

I also expressed concern that test-score scales lack an essential property for comparing test-score gains: an interval of, say, 50 points at one point on the scale cannot be assumed to represent the same achievement growth as a 50-point interval elsewhere on the scale. Stone does not say much about this other than that my criticisms are "based principally on theory, not evident deficiencies." On this point he is right, but only because these deficiencies will not be apparent until a single test is scaled multiple ways and the resulting assessments of schools and teachers are compared. Because practitioners of value-added assessment never do this, they cannot take comfort in the absence of "evident deficiencies." William Sanders (see above) writes that psychometricians are not all of the view that achievement scales lack an equal-interval property. This is so. Sanders also writes that statistical adjustments can accommodate any problems that might arise from scale indeterminacy. On this point, Sanders and I do not agree. Once a scaling decision is made, it affects the numbers on which all subsequent statistical analyses are based. It cannot be adjusted away.

As a result, scale indeterminacy poses a serious problem for value-added assessment. The burden of proof is on its practitioners to show that ratings assigned to educators do not vary when alternative (but in all essential respects, equivalent) scales are used. That burden of proof has not been met. Further research may yet find a way forward, but I am skeptical.

Meanwhile, there are other ways of using test data to assess schools and teachers. As states adopt comprehensive testing programs in response to the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, large databases will be assembled that make it feasible to compare the progress of any given student with a peer group that has a similar history of test results. Teachers will be able to answer the following kinds of questions: Did my students who started at the upper end of the distribution make progress equal to the statewide median gain for such students? If not, was their progress at least equal to the gain of 40 percent of the comparison group? Thirty percent? Answers to such questions should tell teachers a good deal about where they have succeeded. Moreover, because the information needed to answer these questions is limited to students' rankings, whether the test scale has the equal-interval property is irrelevant.

California schooling

Michael Kirst ("Swing State," Feature, Summer 2002) doubts that California has the will to stay the course and improve on the essential components of a comprehensive accountability system.

Kirst is too pessimistic. In 1995, California initiated a process that led to comprehensive K–12 academic standards, a statewide norm-referenced test, and the development of a criterion-referenced exam aligned to the standards. Three years ago the state implemented a strong accountability system. Through two education-oriented governors (Republican Pete Wilson and Democrat Gray Davis) and much hand-wringing by the education establishment, the essential features

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of this system remain in place.

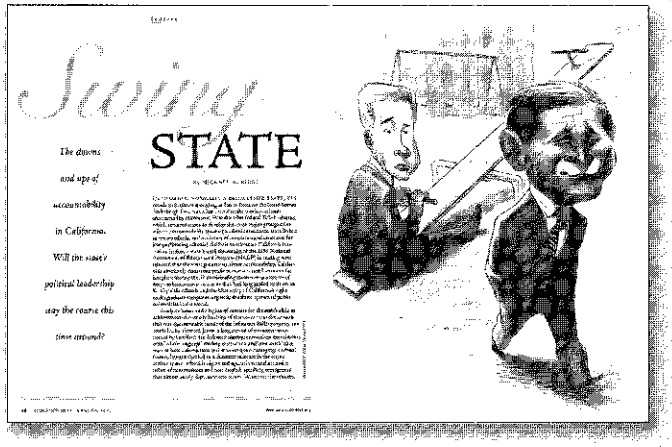
Kirst asserts that the low-performing schools initiative disaggregates test scores "by race and ethnicity, but schools need only raise their overall scores to avoid the intervention program." Wrong. California law is very clear. In order for schools to receive financial awards for high performance or to avoid sanctions, they must demonstrate progress for all socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial categories and for students learning English. The purpose of the law is to make sure schools do not neglect the academic needs of groups of students who traditionally perform poorly.

Regarding low-performing schools, Kirst argues, "It is less clear how a [low-performing] school can get itself out of the doghouse." No, it is very clear: such schools must meet the annual growth targets called for under the Academic Performance Index. In the first cohort of more than 400 low-performing schools, more than 100 failed to meet these growth targets and now are (rightfully, in my opinion) the target of possible restructuring. The remaining low-performing schools are not "in the doghouse."

California certainly has a long way to go, especially for its low-performing schools and low-performing students. Refining its testing instruments and continuing to expand its commitment to professional development are, in my view, particularly high priorities. Contrary to Kirst's suggestion, there is no turning back on our accountability system. The public and its elected representatives will not stand for it.

GARY HART
former California Secretary of Education
Sacramento, Calif.

Michael Kirst has presented a sweeping and accurate description of 20 years of assessment in California. The accountability system in California has many minor issues that need to be addressed. However, it has succeeded at switching the conversation in school board meetings and in the legislature to issues of student achievement. We are now able to find the many high-poverty, high-achieving schools in California and to inspire all educators to do as well as these amazing institutions.


Saving
STATE
The drama and ups of accountability in California. Will the state's political leadership stay the course this time around?

In the long term, Governor Gray Davis will be recognized not for lifting school funding from less than $5,000 to more than $7,000 per child; not for boosting charter schools from 150 to 432; and not for the massive teacher development and curriculum programs. He will be recognized for putting in place an assessment system that drives steady improvement in classroom education for the next 20 years.

REED HASTINGS
President
California State Board of Education
Los Gatos, Calif.

Michael Kirst responds: Since the state's nonpartisan legislative analyst now forecasts a budget deficit of at least $10 billion for 2003, it is unlikely that the impressive spending for education accountability of the past two years will continue. Implementing accountability requires incentives (as well as sanctions) plus training for staff and curricular materials for schools. The huge budget deficit will make paying for this very difficult.

Gary Hart recommends "restructuring" low-performing schools, but this concept was never well defined during the 1990s. Moreover, can the understaffed California state department of education manage or oversee a large number of these low-performing schools? If not, what is the final process for restructuring, and will it raise test scores? Will the state's assistance money for restructuring survive the budget deficit?

Hart is correct that California law specifies that gains must include separate scores for racial/ethnic and economically disadvantaged students. My point was that California allows schools to meet annual progress targets if students in specific racial, ethnic, and economically disadvantaged categories achieve 80 percent of the state's annual growth target. The federal law will not permit 80 percent success for some students and 100 percent for others.

Also, the federal law specifies that test increases must occur for handicapped children and for children who speak limited English; it also requires separate score targets for reading and math, while the California law allows a merged reading and math score for annual yearly progress.

To date, California's accountability system hasn't denied a diploma or forced the takeover of a low-performing school. Let's wait to see what happens when the consequences really occur.

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Charters BESET

New obstacles to continuing growth

IN ONLY A DECADE, charter schools have grown from just a notion to some 2,700 schools across the nation. They range from small independent schools, often emanating from visionary teachers and parents, to franchise schools run by major education management firms, such as Charter Schools USA, Nobel Learning, and Edison Schools. As the movement matures, however, threats to its growth abound. School districts want to staunch the loss of students and funding to charters. Teacher unions object to the expansion of these public yet mostly nonunionized schools. Politicians cave in to the complaints of these powerful interests. And the movement itself needs to find the proper balance between small-scale, locally run schools and management firms that have the know-how and resources to finance their school models. All of which gives rise to a question crucial to the movement's future: Can charter schools sustain their growth while retaining their innovative spirit?

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN VASCONCELLOS

Bryan C. Hassel cheers on "mom and pop" charters
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Bruno V. Manno performs a threat analysis
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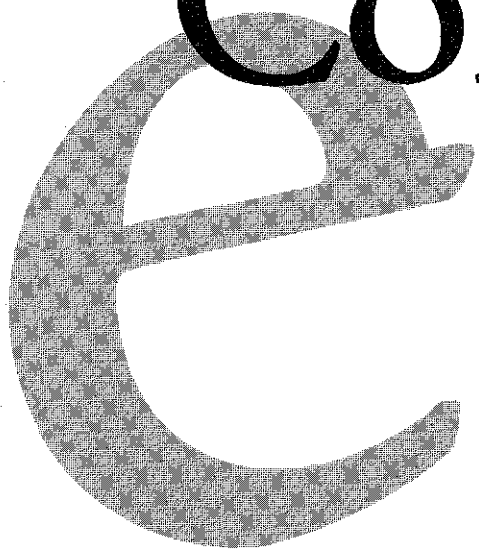
Friendly Competition



Sleek education management firms are a vital component of the charter school movement, but innovation is more likely from the visionaries who create unique, grassroots charters

EVERYONE HAS READ THE UBIQUITOUS FEATURE STORY about a charter school—Jane and John Q. Public and their friends, sitting around somebody's kitchen table, dream up a different kind of school for their kids. Putting in hours of sweat equity, charging start-up costs to their credit cards, maybe even mortgaging their homes to bring their dream to reality. Making the economics work by taking parent involvement to a whole new level—parents driving buses, cleaning school bathrooms, mastering the intricacies of state financial reporting requirements.

Charter schools with origins like these can be compelling and unique, models of the outside-the-box approaches these schools are supposed to pilot. And most of the dramatic success stories from the charter world come from schools founded by teachers or community members. For example:

- *KIPP Academy, Houston.* At KIPP, a middle school founded by two former Teach for America members, one recent class entered with passing rates of 35 and 33 percent on state math and reading tests. The following year, the class's rates rose to 93 and 92 percent.

- *The Accelerated School, Los Angeles.* Opened by two teachers in 1994 and named *Time* magazine's "Elementary School of the Year" in 2001, the school reports that its scores on the Stanford Achievement test have jumped 97 percent since 1997.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN VASCONCELLOS

by BRYAN C. HASSEL

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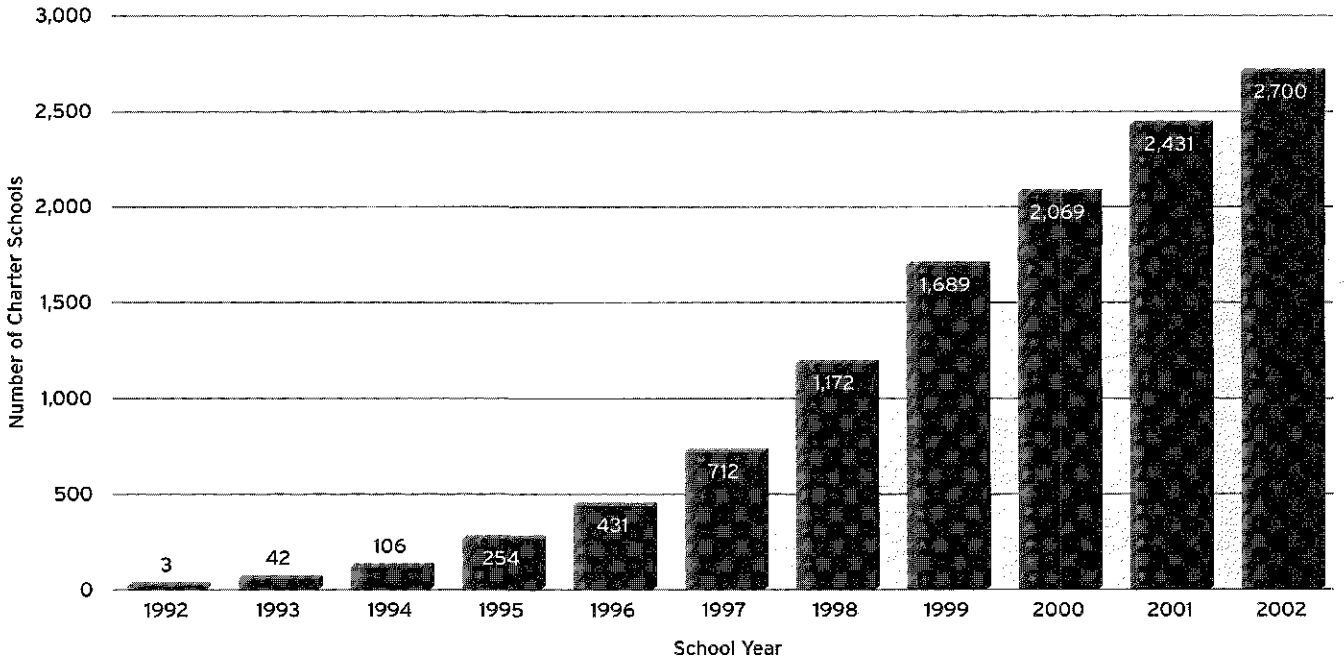
Growth Slowing (Figure 1)

The early years of the charter school movement saw doubling and even tripling in the number of charter schools. In recent years, however, the rate of growth began to slow.



SOURCE: Center for Education Reform

✦ *North Star Academy, Newark, New Jersey.* Based on preliminary results from the spring 2000 state test, 88 percent of the school's first 8th grade class scored proficient or above in language arts (compared with 47 percent citywide), and 66 percent scored proficient or above in math (versus 21 percent citywide).

Numbers like these are eye-catching. But can these stand-alone, typically small charter schools serve as the basis for a sustainable, large-scale movement for change in education? Or are they likely to remain the exception rather than the rule? After all, starting an innovative, successful charter school is extraordinarily difficult, and few entrepreneurs seem cut out for the job.

Small Businesses

There are certainly reasons to think of successful stand-alone charter schools as an interesting but ultimately marginal phenomenon. Starting a public school from scratch is, in a word, difficult. It has become a cliché that charter schools, in addition to being educational institutions, have to succeed as small businesses—balancing their budgets; negotiating leases, financing packages, and contracts; and making payroll. Individuals and small teams—often teachers, parents, or community activists who have never run schools—are apt to possess some but not all of these skills and backgrounds.

Opening a new school also requires capital. Most charter schools receive federally funded start-up grants of $10,000 to $150,000 for one to three years. Beyond that, they cannot expect any public funds to flow until, if they're lucky, the July before they open. However, expenses can't wait. Principals need to be hired a few months before school starts. Ideally, teachers start at least a few weeks before students arrive. Then there are books and bookshelves, desks and desktop computers, and all the other supplies that need to be purchased. And all of that doesn't include the big kahuna of start-up costs: the charter school facility.

The first decade of charter schools has unearthed entrepreneurs who are willing and, in some cases, able to take on these herculean tasks. They've proven themselves able to secure the requisite start-up capital—by becoming enterprising fundraisers, by "partnering" with others who have deeper pockets, by finding creative ways to keep start-up costs down, or by going without amenities that are standard-issue in the typical district school. Even with all these challenges, approximately 2,700 charter schools will be open during the 2002–'03 school year, educating some 700,000 students.

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RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL CHARTER SCHOOL IS EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT, AND FEW ENTREPRENEURS SEEM CUT OUT FOR THE JOB.

This supply of entrepreneurs can work if we're talking about a reform that captures just 1 percent of the nation's public school market share. But what if we're interested in creating a set of schools that educate 10 percent, 20 percent, or an even greater share of American students? Are there enough social entrepreneurs out there to do *that*?

Let's consider this question. Nationally, the growth of charter schools was dramatic in the years following the passage of the initial charter laws (see Figure 1). In 2001 and 2002, however, the number of new charter schools opening in the fall actually declined compared with the previous year.

Statutory caps on charter schools have caused some of this leveling, but not all of it. Even in jurisdictions with few restrictions on new starts, the numbers tend to decline over time. It appears that within a given geographical area lives a limited supply of entrepreneurs willing to undertake starting a charter school, a supply that peters out over time. Not to zero, but to what amounts to a drop in the bucket of public schooling in a city or state.

Enter the EMOs

"Education management organizations," or EMOs, are sometimes touted as the solution to these challenges. According to the Center for Education Reform, 19 of these companies ran 350 charter schools in 2001–'02, about 14 percent of the nation's charter schools. Since EMO-run schools are typically larger than the average charter school, EMOs actually educate an even higher percentage of charter school *students*—perhaps 25 to 30 percent.

Most EMOs today are for-profit companies, such as Edison Schools and Nobel Learning Communities, but not all. Aspire Public Schools, for example, is a nonprofit seeking to operate a large chain of public schools, at least initially in California. The nonprofit New Schools Venture Fund has established a "Charter Accelerator" initiative to invest in more nonprofit EMOs.

EMOs offer many answers to the leadership supply question:

- *Expertise and systems.* Starting and operating a school requires expertise across a range of fields—curriculum and instructional design, facilities management, community relations. EMOs can hire experts in these areas or develop expertise over time and then share knowledge and capacity with their constituent schools. They can turn expertise into systems so that every school doesn't have to reinvent the wheel.

- *Economies of scale.* As they operate more and more schools, EMOs can use their growing buying power to obtain favorable terms for goods and services. By negotiating bulk purchase contracts with suppliers, they can reduce per-student costs.

- *Capital (for research and development and possibly facilities).* At least for EMOs, the prospects of long-term profitability make it possible to raise capital from venture investors or, in a smaller number of cases, like Edison Schools, the public markets. For nonprofits, philanthropic funds serve a similar purpose. This capital allows the companies to make substantial investments in R&D—such as Edison's multiyear curriculum design project, which took place largely before the company operated a single school. Some EMOs have also deployed capital to help meet the challenge of financing facilities.

- *Incentive and capacity to cultivate leaders.* As important as a company's expertise and systems are to its schools, the quality of the school-level leadership is still critical for the success of EMO-run schools. EMOs have strong incentives to seek out high-potential leaders and develop their capabilities over time. And because they operate multiple schools, they are in a position to develop a "farm system" and create opportunities for career advancement that would not be possible in "mom-and-pop" charters.

- *Incentive and capacity to sustain schools over time.* If a stand-alone charter school experiences troubles, the founders or current leaders may try strenuously to get the school back on course. But if they fail, no institution is likely to do the hard work of saving the school. The school district may be glad to see the school go; the charter authorizer may not have the capacity or the philosophical inclination to intervene. But if an EMO school begins to sink, the EMO has strong incentives to rescue it. And they may have the resources to do so, by sending in new leadership or expertise.

The Dilemma of Scale

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to rely on EMOs alone to

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sustain the charter school sector over time, for three reasons.

First, though EMOs bring substantial monetary and human resources to the table, they are not immune from financial and management challenges of their own. One of the major national EMOs, National Heritage Academies, recently reported an annual profit. But most of the scale players in the market have been for-profits only in the legal documents. Investments in capacity and marketing have swamped revenues for the typical EMO.

Second, for-profit EMOs exacerbate the built-in political challenges of creating charter schools. Under any circumstances, charter schools ignite political controversy (see Bruno Manno's article, "Yellow Flag," on page 16). But when they are operated by for-profit entities, they become even more of a lightning rod. Grassroots organizations like ACORN, which have supported charter schools—even started their own—have led vigorous campaigns against Edison Schools' involvement in troubled public systems like those of Philadelphia, New York, and San Francisco.

These experiences raise questions about the political viability of a charter school movement that becomes largely composed of schools run by for-profit EMOs. Charter school policies have attracted unlikely coalitions that include free-marketeers and business leaders, but also community-based organizations, civil-rights groups, and other nontraditional allies. It seems that the support of nonconservative charter advocates depends, in part, on the fact that up to now the movement has been composed mostly of grassroots, community-based schools—not franchises of profit-seeking companies.

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS HAVE STRONG INCENTIVES TO SEEK OUT HIGH-POTENTIAL LEADERS AND DEVELOP THEIR CAPABILITIES OVER TIME.

Finally, and perhaps most important, EMOs may not be the most likely source of innovation—and thus of the kind of dramatic gains in performance that we need to see in schools. For several reasons, the drive for scale militates against out-of-the-box approaches. To begin with, attracting sufficient enrollment is vital for EMOs; the need to fill seats is bound to drive companies to appeal to the "median" consumer, who might balk at strange new grade configurations or pedagogical approaches.

The companies' internal dynamics also push toward the conventional. EMOs face the substantial challenge of scaling up an educational and organizational model across multiple sites, perhaps across a wide geography. It makes sense in that context to select the familiar, the easily conveyed. The same goes for personnel. If a company needs 30 principals, the average hire is more apt to resemble the typical principal than the renegade that a stand-alone charter school might seek.

Herein lies a great dilemma facing the charter movement. To become a serious force for change in education, charter schools as a group need to achieve greater scale. The most obvious path to scale is the proliferation of chains of schools run by education management organizations. For financial and political reasons, though, looking exclusively to EMOs for scale is a poor strategy. In addition, the breakthrough innovations that are part of the great promise of charter schools may be more likely to emerge from schools that are, at least initially, single-site start-ups. But such schools are limited in number and small in size—hardly the basis for a large-scale movement.

Resolving this dilemma requires thinking about "scale" in two new ways. First, what would it take to enable more successful, stand-alone schools to "scale up"—by replicating themselves or through other means? Second, what would it take to create an environment in which much larger numbers of successful, stand-alone charter schools can form and thrive?

Scaling Proven Models

Education is notorious for single-school success stories that serve as fodder for *60 Minutes* and feature films, but are never "replicated" elsewhere. Within traditional school systems, it's not hard to see why. The incentives to adopt good ideas from other schools are weak, and the constraints on change—from policy and culture—are strong.

The charter school strategy has the potential to overcome this conventional failure by providing a space within which it's easier to scale up what works via the creation of *new* schools. But most effective charter schools remain single-site successes. Charter leaders have their hands full even several years into start-up. Their "model" may actually be heavily reliant on the personal leadership of one or more founders and/or local ties and circumstances, which are difficult or impossible to "bottle."

Still, a small number of successful charter schools are beginning to explore scaling in one way or another:

KIPP Academies. Based on the success of the two initial KIPP academies in Houston and the Bronx, KIPP decided to scale

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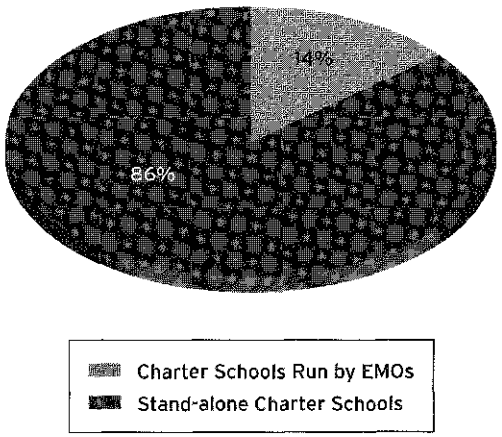
Corporate Takeover? (Figure 2)

During the 2001-'02 school year, 19 education management organizations (EMOs) ran a combined 14 percent of the nation's charter schools. About a quarter of the charter school students are educated in EMO-run schools, due to the larger size of EMO schools compared with "mom and pop" charters.



SOURCE: Center for Education Reform

up with support from the Pisces Foundation and other philanthropists. KIPP's approach to scale relies on developing *leaders* to open and operate new public schools—both charter and district-based. The highly selective Fisher Fellows program inducts 20 to 25 aspiring school founders per year and provides them with a summer training program that includes classroom instruction at Berkeley's Haas School of Business—half focused on business matters, and half on academic and school issues. Fellows then do a four-month residency in an existing KIPP Network school. By spring, fellows go to work founding a school—with intensive assistance from KIPP national. Support continues over three years, ending with an "inspection" to assess how well the school lives up to KIPP's "five pillars"—the general principles that define a KIPP school.

By 2010, KIPP aims to have started a total of 200 schools nationally. If successful, the resulting network will be an interesting model. It won't be an EMO—each school will be an independent entity, subscribing to the five pillars, but each unique. But it will capture some of the advantages of scale, primarily in the start-up phase. At this point, KIPP does not seem focused on reaping other potential values of scale, such as the power of joint purchasing or the centralization of certain routine functions.

Minnesota New Country School/EdVisions. Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, Minnesota, is unique in two respects. First, its learning program is very unusual. Almost all of its high-school instruction takes place through personalized project-based inquiry, facilitated by teachers and relying heavily on the computers sitting on nearly every child's desk. More traditional forms of instruction are used as well, but only as needed to ensure the mastery of basic skills. Second, the school is run by a cooperative of teachers, who make all the key decisions about the school—from the learning program to the budget to hiring and firing. With funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the EdVisions cooperative is now seeking to spread this dual model to 15 new secondary schools over five years. Gates funding will go both to the new sites and to EdVisions central, which will provide intensive start-up assistance. Six sites are currently involved at different stages.

High Tech High. Founded by tech industry leaders and educators in San Diego, High Tech High is undertaking various efforts to scale up its design, which offers a rigorous, personalized program focusing on math, science, and technology, and providing extensive connections to the "adult" world through internships and other means. Like KIPP and EdVisions, part of High Tech High's scale-up work involves helping others found similar schools in nine sites around the country. This initiative is also funded by the Gates Foundation. But High Tech's approach includes other elements as well. It has developed a Learning Resource Center, a detailed online source of information about the school's approach that allows anyone in the world to access and use the school's resources. It is engaged in various initiatives to prepare teachers to use its approaches in their own schools. And it is participating in a local effort to design 14 new high schools to be built in San Diego over the next decade.

TO BECOME A SERIOUS FORCE FOR CHANGE IN EDUCATION, CHARTER SCHOOLS AS A GROUP NEED TO ACHIEVE GREATER SCALE.

Nevertheless, expanding beyond a single campus or city presents added challenges—challenges that so far have prevented most successful charter schools from seriously pursuing scale. What's needed is a new infrastructure that makes scale-up more feasible—a diverse range of service providers capable of helping schools with a whole array of needs. If such a system

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existed, it would be easier for successful schools to scale up, just as it would be easier for brand-new stand-alone schools to start.

Service Providers

Presently, starting a new school from scratch is just too difficult and painful, even for people who are capable of pulling it off. Much of the work goes into activities such as transportation, food service, accounting, regulatory compliance, zoning battles, mortgages, and the like, activities that are *not* where education needs innovative, fresh thinking. It seems likely that there is a large reservoir of entrepreneurial educators and non-educators who would be willing to engage in school start-up—*if* it were not such a nightmare.

Part of the answer certainly lies in the policy arena—giving charter schools equitable access to funding (including capital funds), cutting unnecessary regulations, ensuring that institutions other than local school boards can issue charters in every jurisdiction.

STAND-ALONE CHARTER SCHOOLS NEED ACCESS TO THE SAME HIGH-QUALITY, POOLED EXPERTISE THAT THE BEST SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND EMOs PROVIDE TO THEIR SCHOOLS.

But just as important are internal or "supply side" solutions. Stand-alone charter schools need access to the same high-quality, pooled expertise that the best school systems and EMOs provide to their schools. They need a set of institutions that can shoulder the burdens of school start-up and management, allowing entrepreneurs to focus on building an excellent educational program. However, to retain their independence, stand-alone schools need to come to these service providers as voluntary, paying customers—not as units controlled by a larger system.

The creative challenge, then, is to imagine a "system" of providers that can deliver this kind of service. Within such a system three attributes, besides quality, seem most important: scope, intensity, and diversity.

Scope. Since operating a school is a complex undertaking, the service infrastructure needs to cover a wide range of issues on which charter school operators may need help. In many service areas, an industry of providers already exists—because school districts and private schools already demand the service. Prime examples include textbook and software publishers, information-management systems, developers of curricula and "comprehensive school reform models," and transportation providers. In other areas, like accounting, payroll, legal services, and facilities development and financing, a host of general-purpose providers already serve nonprofits and small businesses. Many of these companies see great potential in the charter school market and have already begun offering their products and services to charter school customers.

However, even where a sector of service providers already exists, its offerings may not be well tailored to the charter context. Charter schools tend to be small, to have limited budgets, and to face uncertain futures due to the vicissitudes of the market and the threat of nonrenewal or revocation of their charters. As a result, conventional providers may find charter schools unattractive in the end. Facilities financing stands out as one illustration, but the same holds true for many curriculum and "whole school reform" providers. While learning programs like Core Knowledge and Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound have seen real opportunities in the charter sector, others have shied away.

New institutions will need to arise—both to meet needs that are unique to charter schools and to design service packages in older service areas that make sense for charter schools.

Intensity. Every state with charter schools has at least one "technical assistance center" for charter schools, and many have more. These organizations tend to provide assistance to charter schools on all the issues they may face. Charter schools call them with every question imaginable. They publish handbooks, newsletters, and websites that seek to address charter schools' concerns, from soup to nuts. One, the California Charter School Development Center, runs "boot camps" for new charter school leaders, running them through a litany of topics.

However, helpful as they are, technical-assistance organizations often are not able to provide *intensive* services to many schools. With their limited resources and broad mandate to serve all schools, it's not possible for most of them to roll up their sleeves day in and day out or to provide full services, like accounting or special education, to charter schools.

Several answers to the need for intense start-up help are emerging in the marketplace. One is the charter school "incubator," exemplified by the Education Resource Center (ERC) in Dayton, Ohio. ERC gets more involved in schools' start-up efforts than most providers of technical assistance, serving as temporary adjunct staff. It is also more selective. Like a venture-capital firm, it sizes up a client's prospects diligently before pro-

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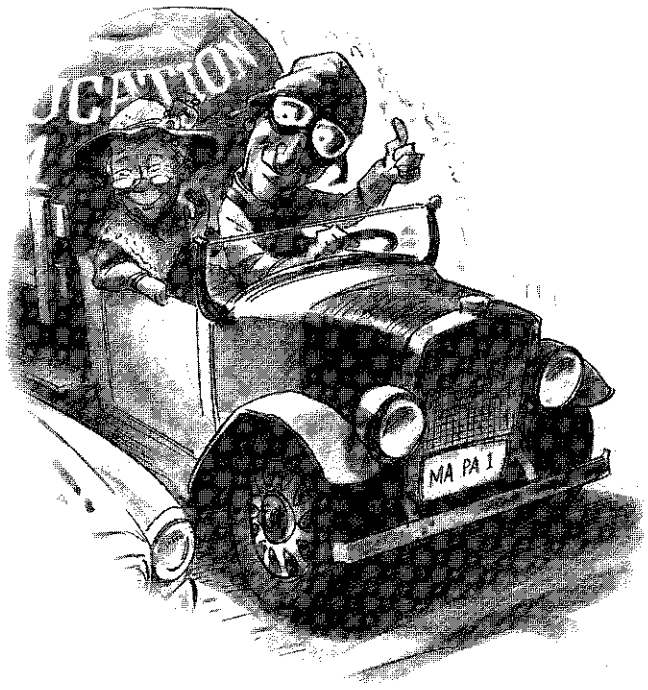
viding help. Incubators have succeeded in the small-business world, but charter incubators are too new to show results. Another avenue is a growing number of fee-for-service start-up providers, such as the Minnesota-based nonprofit School-Start. Charter entrepreneurs contract with these organizations to provide all-purpose help in the start-up phase—help in preparing the charter application, writing the budget, finding a facility, selecting an appropriate learning program, and hiring teachers. The Education Performance Network (EPN), the professional-services affiliate of New American Schools, is taking a different tack by creating an "education management support organization." EPN offers clients a menu of services including data management, accountability and evaluation, program design, and charter start-up and implementation. A key aim of EPN is to help build charter schools' ability to manage themselves over time.

A third trend is the emergence of leadership development programs for would-be charter entrepreneurs. Examples include the Fisher Fellowship program, New Leaders for New Schools, and the Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center's Leadership Institute. These organizations seek to provide in-depth training to potential school leaders, including both classroom and on-the-job components. Some follow up the learning with hands-on start-up assistance for graduates.

Finally, several national organizations have begun to help their local affiliates start charter schools. The YMCA is one. Another is the National Council of La Raza, a leading Hispanic advocacy and development organization. La Raza has put together the most intensive package of services—including hands-on consulting for community-based groups starting charter schools, joint professional development opportunities, and the creation of national partnerships that can be useful to all of the network's schools—which La Raza hopes will number 50 by 2005.

Diversity. Third, schools needs access to a variety of providers so they can shop around for the best quality, fit, and prices. In contrast to district-based service systems, in which the central office or its chosen contractors provide all services to schools, the essence of the charter school service system must be diversity and choice.

On this front, early trends are promising. Across the different domains of service, many different types of providers are emerging. Besides the for-profit and nonprofit providers already mentioned, charter schools in some places have formed cooperatives and associations to take advantage of economies of scale. Special education has been an especially fertile area for charter cooperatives, with models emerging in the District of Columbia, Texas, Minnesota, and Indianapolis. For example, the D.C. Public Charter School Cooperative, with 21 members, aims to provide information to members about the complexities of special education, hire and make available specialized staff that no school would want to employ alone, and develop a Medicaid billing system to increase reimbursements for special-education services.



WE CAN IMAGINE A FUTURE IN WHICH GRASSROOTS CHARTER SCHOOLS REMAIN THE HEART OF THE MOVEMENT, BUT IN A SUSTAINABLE FASHION.

Developing the range of service providers necessary to expand the charter movement will require investment on the part of firms, philanthropists, and governments at the local, state, and national level. If this comes to pass, we can imagine a charter school sector characterized by both scale *and* a diversity of entrepreneurial schools, a future in which grassroots charter schools remain the heart of the movement, but in a sustainable fashion.

–Bryan C. Hassel is president of Public Impact, a consulting firm based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

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Yellow FLAG

by BRUNO V. MANNO

The charter school movement will need to overcome a raft of political obstacles and high-profile scandals

SINCE 1991, 40 STATES HAVE ENACTED LAWS ALLOWING FOR THE CREation of charter schools—independent public schools of choice that are freed from many regulations but accountable for their results. There are now 2,700 schools that serve some 600,000 students in 34 states and the District of Columbia (see Figure 1), with cities like Washington, D.C., and Dayton, Ohio, now enrolling upwards of 17 percent of all their children in these new institutions.

While such numbers are impressive—a decade ago there were no charter schools—we also see worrisome indications that the charter movement is in trouble. In July 2002, *Newsweek* reported that a raft of recent charter "reports find that too often, charters haven't lived up to their end of the bargain." A Brookings Institution study released in September 2002 concluded that student performance in charter schools was significantly lower than that of district schools on state tests in reading and math.

At the same time, signs of a vital and thriving charter school movement abound. Nationally, demand for these schools remains high, with more than 75 percent of charters having waiting lists that together could fill at least 900 more schools. The parents, students, and educators involved with charter schools report high levels of satisfaction. A California State University, Los Angeles, study of California charters, released in March 2002, found that their test-score gains outpaced those of students in regular public schools. In Massachusetts, the test scores of charter schools on the Spring 2002 state test showed, according to the *Boston Herald*, "a greater number of

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OPPONENTS ARE NOW REGROUPING, AS THE VIGOROUS GROWTH OF THE CHARTER MOVEMENT HAS ALARMED ITS ADVERSARIES.

improved scores . . . with more and more of the [charters] scoring higher than their home districts." Even the Brookings study may say less than it seems. The investigators themselves acknowledge that their findings may be due to the fact that charters are attracting "students who were already low achieving," a suspicion supported by other studies that find charter students to be relatively disadvantaged.

Not only are many charter schools enjoying success, but they are also held accountable in a way regular public schools are not. When a charter school experiences severe troubles, it usually faces severe consequences. To wit, more than 200 failed or failing schools have been closed on fiscal, educational, and organizational grounds.

Can Success Survive?

In the education world, however, success often breeds second-guessing if not downright resentment. The more traction a successful reform gains, the more sour grapes it harvests. Despite strong, bipartisan political support, charter schools have not been immune from this attitude. America's deeply conservative public education system is striking back at this disruptive innovation, which shifts power from producers to consumers; demonstrates that more can be done with less at the school level; and moves control of resources from central bureaucracies to autonomous schools. Such tectonic shifts bring new uncertainties and imply that many hoary public education practices are no longer the only imaginable way to do things.

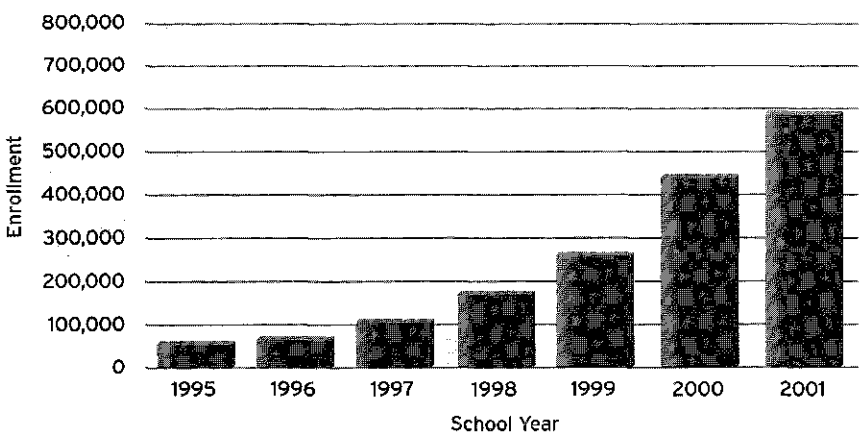
The initial efforts to stop the spread of charter schools took three main forms: preventing the enactment of charter laws; limiting the number of new charters; and ensuring that existing charter schools were as meagerly funded and as heavily regulated as possible.

These strategies succeeded to some extent. For example, Washington State, among other states, still has no charter school law—mostly because of intense opposition from the teacher unions and other interests vested in the status quo. Among those states with charter laws on the books, more than a third have fewer than 20 charter schools in operation. In addition, the early growth of the charter movement may be reaching a plateau—in part due to the hostile tactics of charter opponents.

One by one, however, states continue to come on board. In 2001, Indiana passed a strong law that allows charters to be granted not only by school districts but also by public universities and by the mayor of Indianapolis. To date, school districts have allowed two schools to convert to charter status; Ball State University has chartered seven new schools; and Indianapolis mayor Bart Peterson has approved four new charters. Eleven of the 13 approved schools opened their doors in September 2002.

Gaining Market Share (Figure 1)

Charter schools now enroll some 600,000 students nationwide, triple the number of students in 1998.



* Estimate

SOURCE: Center for Education Reform

Three-Front War

Opponents are now regrouping, as the vigorous growth of the charter movement and its impact on traditional district schools has alarmed its adversaries. The resulting attacks come from three directions: state policymakers, local school systems, and organized public education interest groups.

State policymakers have an entire arsenal of charter-harassing weapons at their disposal. These include depriving charters of full per-pupil funding; denying them access to (or financing for) facilities; placing new restric-

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tions on existing schools or moratoriums on future growth; and weakening charter laws. Two states provide vivid illustrations.

Indiana's entry into the charter movement was nearly arrested in early 2002 when Suellen Reid, the Republican state superintendent of public instruction, balked at giving Indiana's new charters any money during their first semester, basing her opinion on legal advice from members of her staff. Nor would these schools be reimbursed for expenses incurred during that semester. Only a contrary ruling from the state's attorney general (at the strong urging of Indianapolis's Democratic mayor, Bart Peterson) led to a reversal of that decision. The reversal, however, prompted an outcry from some legislators and from the superintendents of the 11 school districts located within Indianapolis. They protested "the adverse financial effects for public schools resulting from the formation of charter schools in our county" and called for a moratorium on the creation of new charters until the "financial inequities" were resolved. Mayor Peterson refused to yield, however, and proceeded to consider a second round of 13 charter applications for the 2003–'04 school year.

California passed its charter law in 1992 (the second state to do so) and now has 362 operating charter schools. But the enemies are circling. The 2001–'02 legislative session passed five anti–charter school bills, four of which were signed into law by Governor Gray Davis (who felt compelled, in one of his signing messages, to claim that he still "supported charter schools"). The most controversial bill gave the state board of education extensive powers to regulate independent study or "nonclassroom"-based instruction that uses computers as the main instructional tool. The bill's intent was to force "virtual" charter schools to spend a high proportion of their budgets on certified staff rather than on technology, stifling their capacity to innovate. These "cyber" charters must now document their instructional minutes, and their per-pupil funding may be reduced if they offer less than the minimum number of student course minutes per year—a district-style regulation of the process of education without regard for outcomes.

Other proposals to cut funding for California charters emerged from the state department of finance. These would have slashed funds for students over age 18 (including former dropouts whom the charters were seeking to "recover") and ended summer-school funding for many charter students. While these proposals were defeated by an organized charter school community led by the California Network of Education Charters, charter operators expect them back in a future legislative session.

Local Opposition

The local districts where charters choose to locate, and from which they draw students, have felt the impact of charters

Competitive States (Figure 2)

Of the 39 states (plus the District of Columbia) with school charter laws, five stand out: Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, and Texas. More than a third of the states have fewer than 20 charters.

State (year law passed)	Total operating in 2002-'03
Arizona (1994)	468
California (1992)	452
Florida (1996)	232
Texas (1995)	228
Michigan (1993)	186
Wisconsin (1993)	115
Ohio (1997)	97
Colorado (1993)	95
North Carolina (1996)	93
Minnesota (1991)	92
Pennsylvania (1997)	91
New Jersey (1996)	56
Massachusetts (1993)	47
District of Columbia (1996)	39
New York (1998)	38
Georgia (1993)	36
Kansas (1994)	30
Illinois (1996)	29
New Mexico (1993)	28
Louisiana (1995)	26
Missouri (1998)	26
Oregon (1999)	26
Hawaii (1994)	25
Connecticut (1996)	16
Alaska (1995)	15
Delaware (1995)	14
Idaho (1998)	14
South Carolina (1996)	14
Nevada (1997)	13
Utah (1998)	12
Indiana (2001)	10
Oklahoma (1999)	10
Rhode Island (1995)	9
Arkansas (1995)	8
Virginia (1998)	8
Mississippi (1997)	1
Wyoming (1995)	1
New Hampshire (1995)	0
Iowa (2002)	0
Tennessee (2002)	0
NATIONWIDE	**2,700**

SOURCE: Center for Education Reform

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IN WASHINGTON, D.C., BOTH THE CITY AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ARE MAKING IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR CHARTERS TO FIND CLASSROOM SPACE.

most heavily. When a district loses students to a charter, most (sometimes all) of the per-pupil funding travels with those students. This places charters in direct competition with districts—and the districts, instead of competing, often try to influence the rules of the game.

In Houston, where 46 of Texas's 219 charter schools are located, the district estimated recently that it will lose about 13,000 students to charters during this school year (up from 12,000 the previous year) at a cost of $53.5 million in state revenues. The city's school board is thinking of asking the state to consider, before it grants any more charters, the financial impact a new charter school will have on district revenues.

Charters may cause trouble for school districts, but they often wind up saving money for the state. For instance, the Dayton, Ohio, school board claims that charters are bleeding the district of some $20 million a year. Of course, they no longer have the students to educate, either. And it costs less to educate a student in a charter than in a district school. Scholars Bryan Hassel and Deborah Page showed that during the 1999–2000 school year, charters in Ohio received about $2,300 less per pupil than local school districts. The seven largest districts in Ohio would each have received $20 to $160 million less in state funds had they operated under the charter school funding formula.

Local school districts can harass charters in many ways. They can devise application procedures with absurd timetables or use meager funding formulas to slash the dollar allocations to charters. City development agencies, zoning boards, or fire inspectors can raise a host of regulatory problems, especially on the most difficult issue that charter schools face: finding a facility.

In 2000, California voters approved Proposition 39, entitling California's charter schools to facilities that are "reasonably equivalent" to those enjoyed by district schools. The Sequoia Union High School District in Redwood City, California (one of the wealthiest in the state), filed suit in May 2002 in San Mateo County Superior Court to stop Aurora Charter High School from receiving its fair share—either in the form of rent money or buildings—of the $88 million bond measure that Sequoia passed in 2001. Sequoia believed that it had no legal obligations to Aurora High because, while the school is located in Sequoia, it was approved by Redwood City, an elementary-school district. Aurora argued that a substantial majority of its students live within the Sequoia district. Aurora countersued the Sequoia district in July 2002. In late August, Judge Quentin Kopp (who served in the California state senate when the Charter Act was passed) ruled that Sequoia must provide facilities for Aurora Charter High School. As of this writing, the district was considering an appeal of this decision.

In Washington, D.C., both the city and the school district are making it nearly impossible for charters to find classroom space, even though the mayor and the school district are broadly sympathetic to charter issues. D.C. law requires city officials to give charter schools the first option to buy surplus buildings—unless the city can make substantially more money by selling them to others. Naturally, this leads the fiscally strapped city to seek private buyers for those buildings in the least disrepair and to offer charters more dilapidated buildings that will cost millions to be made safe for children. One charter founder reported that the building his school was offered had "$3 million worth of asbestos issues and [would have] cost us $10 million [more] to renovate." Meanwhile, the D.C. school system offers charters only one-year leases on vacant schools in the (unlikely) event that the district needs to reclaim the school for its own purposes.

Interest Group Attacks

A phalanx of interests, from teacher unions to school boards and superintendents, principals' associations, teacher colleges, disabled-rights groups, and even private schools, often find reasons to view charter schools as a threat. Let's consider two of these: the teacher unions and private schools.

The unions' initial response to charter laws was defiance. In time, they realized that this looked bad—the charter idea was popular in too many quarters. So they moved from outright hostility to a highly conditional embrace, with the National Education Association beginning its own charter school project in 1996 (and subsequently abandoning it). In the words of an *Education Week* reporter, "Both national unions have endorsed the charter idea within fairly narrow limits, requiring district control over the schools and collective bargaining for the teachers within them." (What would distinguish such a charter school from traditional public schools remains unclear.) The American Federation of Teachers' July 2002 report, *Do Charter Schools Measure Up?* which calls for a moratorium on the expansion of charters, signals a renewed hos-

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tility toward charter schools (see Robert Maranto, "Lobbying in Disguise," page 79 in this issue).

Today, the unions' stance toward charters is convoluted, sometimes trying to co-opt the movement, other times trying to stop it cold.

A once-secret report prepared by the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) lays out a strategy that would organize all charter employees under the NEA affiliate's collective bargaining agreement, thereby depriving charter operators of a key element of their autonomy. As the authors explained, "The main source of the PSEA's influence is that almost all Pennsylvania teachers are unionized. If we want to maintain influence, our ability to do anything, we must make sure that education remains a unionized industry." Here the union is hedging its bets, trying to weaken the charter movement while also ensuring that any teachers who do slide into charter schools will remain union members.

In Ohio the unions have mounted a new effort to sink charter schools. Tom Mooney, president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers, is leading two ever-widening lawsuits seeking to have the state's charter law ruled unconstitutional. Tactics include involving all of Ohio's charter schools in the lawsuit and requiring them to deliver school records on a variety of issues, tying up time, energy, and resources in matters far removed from classroom instruction. This courtroom effort is also apt to chill charter enrollments, teachers, and public perception of the charter movement.

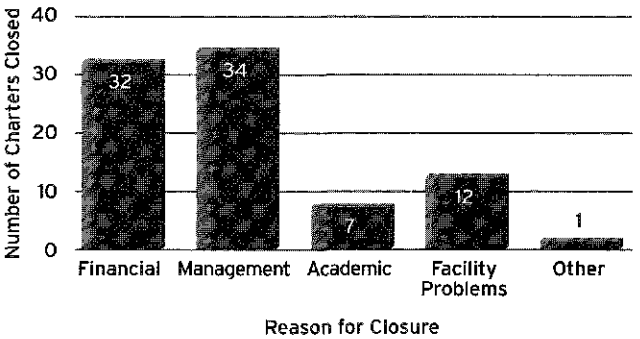
Private schools also sometimes see charter schools as a threat to their finances and influence. For instance, some charter schools are attracting large numbers of students from Catholic schools. The Archdiocese of Newark has lost 139 students to charter schools; the Archdiocese of Detroit, 300 students. Of the 776 students enrolled in St. Louis charter schools, 21 percent came from private schools—13 percent from Catholic schools and 8 percent from nonreligious private schools. While private-school leaders have not grumbled openly about charters, Sister Glenn Anne McPhee of the U.S. Catholic Conference has noted that they are watching the situation closely to see what effect the charter movement is apt to have on Catholic schools over time.

Enemies Within

Some self-inflicted wounds of the charter movement have strengthened the hands of its critics and opponents. These include greedy charter operators keener to make a quick buck at public expense than to educate children; inept operators whose schools are fiscally disastrous and academically inadequate; sponsors that exercise little care in reviewing charter proposals or monitoring the schools' progress; and supporters who press sponsors to leave the schools alone—even to renew their charters—notwithstanding their organizational, financial, and instructional failures.

Truly Accountable (Figure 3)

As of January 2001, 86 charter schools had been forced to shut their doors for financial, academic, and other reasons.



Note: Figures do not include charters that consolidated with district or private schools (26 as of January 2001) or charter schools that never opened (50 schools).

SOURCE: Center for Education Reform

Some of these schools have engaged in egregious misbehavior. In Houston, Reverend Harold Wayne Wilcox opened the Prepared Table Charter School in 1998. It rapidly grew to 1,500 students on three campuses, making it one of Texas's largest charters. After state auditors investigated the school's operations, however, the Texas Education Authority concluded that Prepared Table had overstated its attendance at a cost to the state of $1.3 million; that it had commingled school funds with those of Reverend Wilcox's church; and that it was governed by virtually the same board members as the church. It also found that members of Wilcox's family were working for the school and that Wilcox, who also served as head of the school, was given a $235,000 buyout package one week before the state convened a hearing to determine what to do with the school. The school was closed and its charter revoked in August 2002.

A RECORD NUMBER OF ARIZONA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS WERE FINED IN 2002 BECAUSE OF LATE AUDITS, IGNORED TESTING REQUIREMENTS, AND FINANCIAL FRAUD.

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NEEDED: A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO PRESSING THE CHARTER MOVEMENT TO CLEAN UP ITS ACT AND DELIVER THE RESULTS PROMISED BY CHARTER BOOSTERS.

Forty-six California charters had their funding reduced when the state scrutinized their financial records during the 2001–'02 school year. They could not document how they had spent substantial sums of money and were unable to show what instructional services they were purchasing from private contractors. In some instances, the private vendors were members of the charter boards, posing conflict-of-interest questions.

In Arizona, a record number of that state's charter schools—31 of 288 reviewed—were fined in 2002 because of "late audits, ignored testing requirements, and financial fraud." This represented more schools than the total number disciplined since charters began in Arizona in 1994.

The basic charter "bargain" grants independence to school operators in return for superior academic results. But with that independence come opportunities for misbehavior—and these are apt to arise well before the results are measured. This places a heavy burden on authorizers to do careful due diligence before awarding charters and to perform ongoing reviews—without clamping down in classic bureaucratic fashion. Some sponsors are not up to this subtle, solemn responsibility.

Consider Techworld Charter School in the District of Columbia. The school was chartered by the elected D.C. board of education in 1997 and opened the following year. It was finally closed in June 2002 after three years of accounting irregularities, governance tiffs, and overreporting of enrollments. It was placed on probation several times during those three years, but was never adequately monitored by the board, which in 2000 was replaced by a new hybrid board of elected and appointed members. The new school board set out to close down the school but encountered a belligerent principal. Just before its closing, he instructed the school's financial manager to award him a $20,000 bonus, along with $5,000 each to eight other employees, including his wife. The school's board of directors began to consider legal action against the principal, whose wife then changed the password to the computer files containing students' grades, hoping to force the board members not to prosecute her husband. The school's directors eventually retrieved the grades through a costly reconstruction of the computer records and turned the matter over to federal prosecutors.

The new D.C. school board moved during the 2001–'02 school year to close three other schools chartered by the previous board. They had an array of problems: overcrowded classrooms with little ventilation, high absentee rates, few textbooks and other instructional materials, abysmal academic results, and failure to file financial reports and to offer the advertised courses. This "cleanup" action could be traced to the failure of the old board to exercise adequate due diligence in approving the original charter application and monitoring the schools. This behavior contrasts sharply with the approach of the alternative, nondistrict chartering authority in D.C., the D.C. Public Charter School Board, which has chartered nearly 20 schools, none of which has been closed.

Counter Attack

The charter movement can no longer coast on a theory and a hope. It has a track record, if not a solid one. This has given new opportunities to those who never liked the charter movement in the first place. But there are ways to strengthen the charter movement to counter the attack. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers, created in 2001, is the kind of institution necessary to support the charter school movement as it matures. Members regularly receive information on topics of high interest to charter authorizers, such as evaluating charter applications and school performance, negotiating accountability agreements, renewal/revocation decisionmaking, policy updates, and state-by-state information on authorizers.

Also needed is a national organization dedicated to pressing the charter movement to clean up its act and deliver the results promised by charter boosters. It would also recruit new charter supporters at the state and local policy level, especially since many governors, legislators, and local activists who gave birth to the charter effort have since moved on to other endeavors. Their successors are disposed to view charters as someone else's idea; are more aware of charters' problems than their successes; and are being skillfully manipulated by interests that have finally recognized that charters aren't going away.

–Bruno V. Manno is senior associate for education at the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation and coauthor, with Chester E. Finn Jr. and Gregg Vanourek, of Charter Schools in Action: Renewing Public Education *(Princeton University Press, 2000).*

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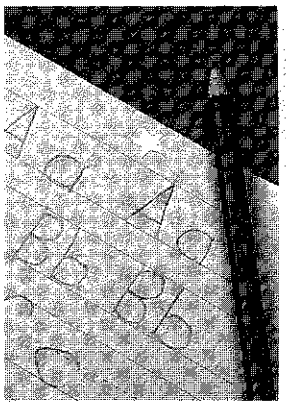

How to bring accountability to special education?

Special education began as a movement to protect the civil rights of children with disabilities. Ensuring that they had access to educational opportunities was the key issue. The 1975 legislation thus mandated that disabled children were to be provided a "free appropriate public education" in the "least restrictive environment." Over time, a complex set of regulations and case law have come to prescribe the procedures school districts must follow in identifying and serving disabled students. This guaranteed, for the most part, that disabled students would be given a variety of instructional supports. Now, however, there is a growing call for guaranteeing not only access but also academic results. The question is how to design a streamlined system that focuses educators more on outcomes than procedures.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELIZABETH LADA

SPECIAL NEEDS

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SISYPHEAN TASKS

The reams of paperwork that currently serve as special education's "accountability" system distract from the practice of teaching and learning. ***It is time to focus on results***

In a recent report for the Abell Foundation, Kalman R. Hettleman documented the troubled history of special education in the Baltimore public school system. He attributed the failure to "the compliance maze" that special education teachers and administrators face, which consists of "ever-proliferating procedures, forms to be filled out, micro-managed administrative functions, reports and audits—all of which far exceed reason and necessity and do not measure the quality of instruction or other services." Hettleman calculated that the school district spends $28 million annually just to document its compliance with the law. Teachers and administrators confided to him that his estimates were, if anything, conservative. Hettleman found that talented teachers are discouraged from entering or remaining in special education because the job essentially requires "a Ph.D. in paperwork."

At the core of the problems in Baltimore and across the nation lies special education's reliance on procedural rules, exhaustive documentation, and legal threats as the only means of holding schools and educators accountable. In the current system, schools that get the process right—that screen children for disabilities in a timely manner; that follow the law in designing an education plan for each disabled child; and that fill out the paperwork documenting that children have received the planned services—have fulfilled their obligations under the law. This is what I call process-based accountability. Schools only need to show that they have complied with the complex regulations and court decisions that govern special education in order to shield themselves from adverse legal rulings—the only real consequence of failure in special education. What they need not show is that disabled students are making gains in achievement.

To focus schools on achievement requires shifting from a process-based accountability system to one driven by results. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education has embraced such a shift. As the commission wrote in its report released in July 2002, special education "will only fulfill its intended purpose if it . . .

by PATRICK J. WOLF

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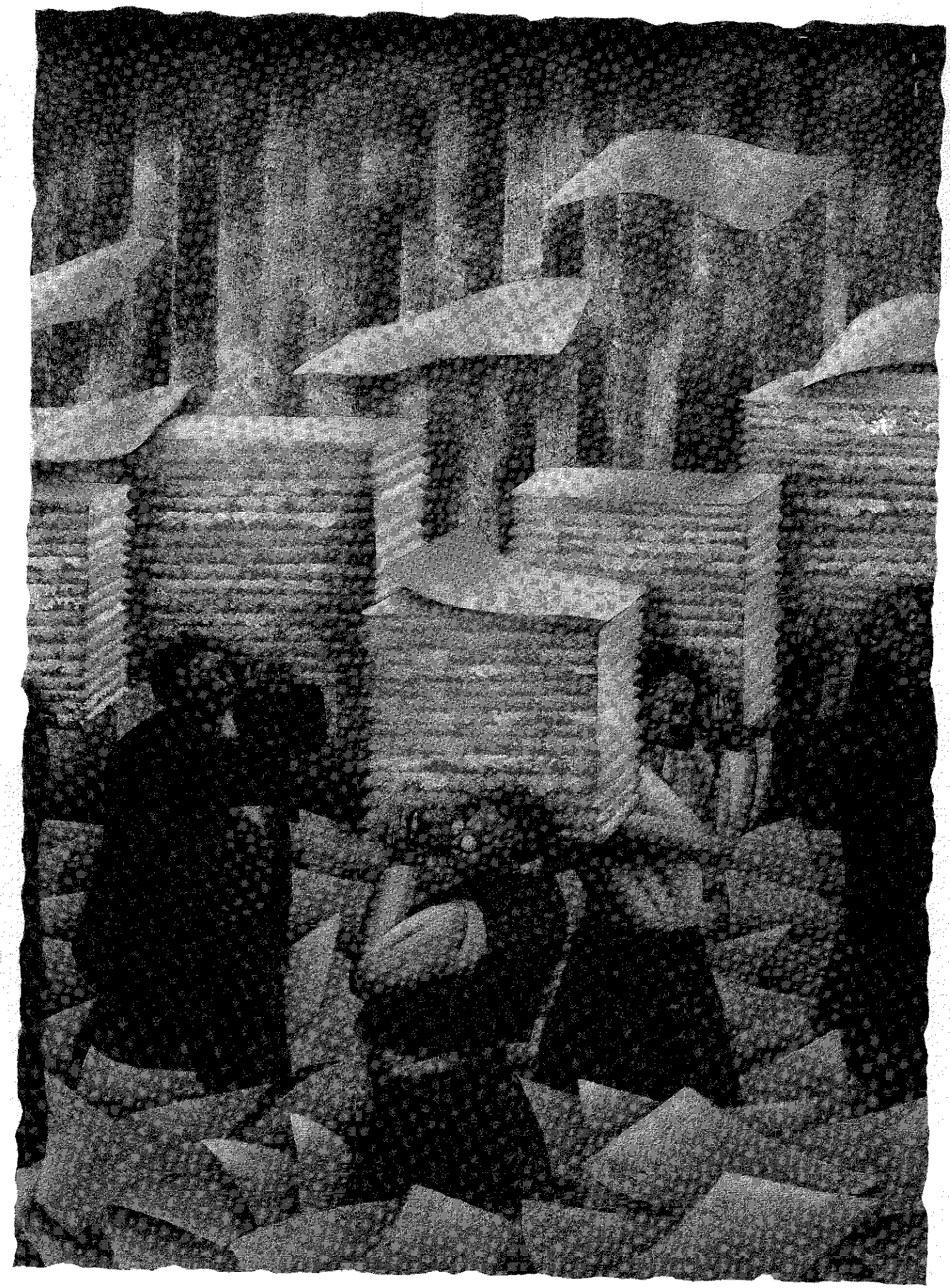

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becomes results-oriented—not driven by process, litigation, regulation, and confrontation." Still, as attractive as a results-based focus in special education is, shifting to this approach will be no simple task. Just as it took a quarter of a century to create the universal special education system we now have, so will it take years to find ways to realize its full potential.

Acronym Soup

I first began analyzing the accountability system for special education two years ago, through a fruitful collaboration with Bryan C. Hassel of Public Impact. We encountered a program that:

- intends to be responsive to disabled children and their families but is often paralyzed by red tape;
- attempts to address the needs of an amazingly diverse group of children yet often relies on standardized approaches and "box checking" oversight;
- absorbs more than $50 billion a year in public funds yet provides no consistent tracking of its performance.

The more than 6 million students who currently receive special education services are a varied lot. A small share, about 10 percent, suffer from *sensory disabilities* such as hearing impairments or *physical and neurological disabilities* such as mobility impairments and autism. The remaining 90 percent have been diagnosed with developmental disabilities such as emotional disturbance and specific learning disabilities, the most common of which are Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Some disabilities, such as severe autism, can profoundly limit the academic achievement of students. Other disabilities, such as mild ADD, have such subtle effects on learning that, until recently, they were rarely diagnosed and treated. Students with specific learning disabilities (LD) now compose the largest of the 13 subcategories of special education—more than 46 percent of all special education students (see Figure 1). Since LD students have a disability that is educationally based and often mild in severity, they are especially well positioned to realize benefits from results-based accountability.

The constant threat of a negative court ruling discourages special educators from attempting unconventional interventions.

The system of accountability within special education currently rests on disabled students' having a legally enforceable right to a "free and appropriate education" (FAPE) in the "least restrictive environment" (LRE). How a school plans to meet the twin goals of FAPE and LRE must be spelled out in each disabled student's individualized education plan (IEP). These are the most important, but by far not the only, mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal statute that, under various names, has guided special education policy since 1975.

If proper procedures are followed, the IEP is the result of recommendations from a team of specialists and teachers and discussions with a student's parents. Parents who disagree with the slate of services a school plans to give their child may protest. If school officials refuse to offer the services requested, parents can demand a due-process hearing or force a move to arbitration. If they disagree with the judgment of the hearing officer or arbiter, they can go to the courts. The threat of litigation provides a strong incentive to either meet parental demands or compile a record of evidence that will persuade court officials that those demands are unreasonable or undesirable.

IDEA guarantees parents the right to a due-process hearing to contest "any matter relating to the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child." The hearings are lawyer-dominated, and parents are reimbursed for their legal expenses if their complaint is affirmed. These guarantees operate on the entire special education system, leading parents to "lawyer up" at IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and other venues where collaboration would be more constructive than confrontation. Education officials respond in kind. The constant threat of a negative court ruling discourages special educators from attempting interventions that are unconventional, creative, or "special" since their lawyers would be at pains to persuade a hearing officer that such an approach is "appropriate" if lawyers for the student's parents argue otherwise. The door only swings one way for parents, however, as attorneys for parents who seek unconventional education programs for their children also tend to lose the "appropriateness" argument. The IDEA law and judicial norms conspire against creative approaches to educating special-needs stu-

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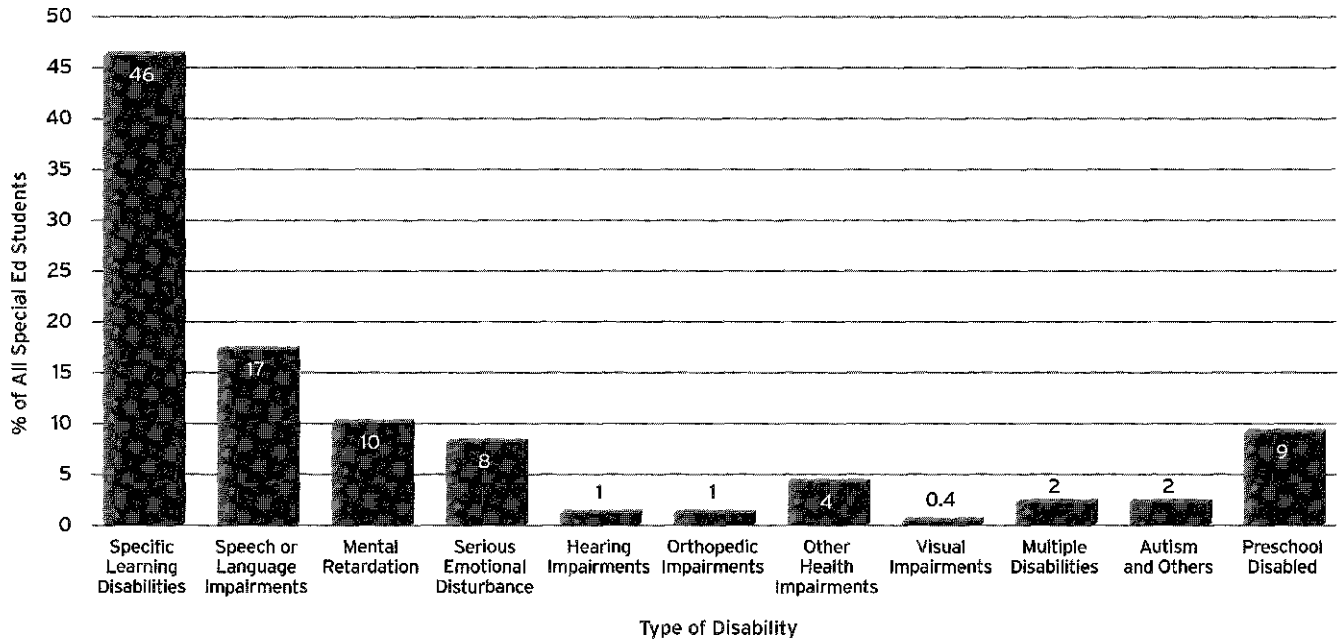
Target Audience (Figure 1)

Students with specific learning disabilities, who now constitute nearly half of the special education population, are well suited to an accountability regime that emphasizes academic outcomes.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2001

dents, regardless of which side is advocating them.

The sad result is that education officials blaze a trail of paperwork showing that proper procedures have been followed and, usually, that a standard (therefore "appropriate") set of services has been rendered. Is a given child receiving an appropriate education? If dozens of boxes have been checked on a form verifying such things as whether parents have been notified of all the summer classes that are available to their student or whether the child has access to nutritional advice, then the answer is yes. Is he being educated in the "least restrictive environment"? If the paperwork confirms that all school facilities are handicapped-accessible and that a certain percentage of each disabled child's school day is spent with nondisabled students, then administrators feel that they can demonstrate, in court if necessary, that the child is being educated in the LRE. In Baltimore, teachers and administrators must verify that 350 separate procedures have been completed for each special education student, regardless of the type and severity of their disability. Informal surveys suggest that teachers spend as much as two days per week just filling out the necessary paperwork.

In school systems where parents are engaged and feel comfortable going toe-to-toe with school administrators, this rights-based accountability system is effective in guaranteeing access to a range of interventions for disabled children. But in areas where parents are not empowered vis-à-vis large institutions, as in urban public schools, this accountability system can't even guarantee access. Students in cities like Baltimore and Washington, D.C., where the special education systems have operated for long stretches under judicial supervision, can go years with undiagnosed and untreated learning disabilities. What a rights-based and process-focused accountability system can't do, even in the toniest of suburbs, is guarantee that disabled students are receiving a solid education.

IDEA '97

Congress and President Clinton sought to correct many of these shortcomings in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. The law was touted as a sea change, aligning special education with the results-based accountability movement. However, as so often happens in reform legislation, the 1997 IDEA amend-

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ments merely layered new testing and reporting requirements onto the existing system, further distracting schools and teachers from their core mission. To my knowledge, only one previous federal process regulation was dropped as a result of IDEA '97. Students with permanent disabilities, such as blindness, no longer need to recertify their disability every three years—a sensible reform, undoubtedly, but hardly a regime shift.

IDEA '97 mandated that disabled students be included in state testing and accountability programs. But the testing requirements of the 1997 amendments harbor many waivers and opt-out provisions. Students deemed "untestable" by professionals are excused from testing. States must report how many special education students didn't participate, but there is no upper limit on the opt-out rate. In addition, local administrators may, quite justifiably, provide special accommodations to students with disabilities who are tested. The accommodations can include modifications of the tests' timing, method, and physical surroundings. Critically, the testing accommodations that are provided to a given student, at the discretion of local administrators, can vary with each administration of the test, thus jeopardizing any longitudinal record of achievement gain or value added. In theory, administrators could classify more students as disabled each year (see Figure 2) and then provide each one with increasingly generous testing accommodations until a desired level of aggregate achievement was obtained. There is no hard evidence that administrators are gaming the numbers, but under the rules of IDEA '97 they could do so and no one would be the wiser.

Most important, the IDEA '97 reforms failed to change the culture of proceduralism in special education. The overwhelming majority of administrators remain obsessed with process and paperwork, whether they like it or not (many don't). Administrators admit that so many resources are plowed into completing the paperwork necessary to comply with both the procedural and results-based accountability dimensions of IDEA '97 that no one has time even to examine the compliance record once it has been painstakingly put together. Moreover, many of the "performance measures" that get reported do not actually measure genuine outcomes, but instead simply relate the percentage of disabled students being tested each year, the percent being mainstreamed, and other workload measures. Such statistics tell us nothing about whether disabled students are learning.

In Baltimore, educators must verify that 350 separate procedures have been completed for each special education student.

Let's switch from the guarantee of a "free and *appropriate* education" to an assurance of a "free and *effective* education."

Results-Based Accountability

A true results-based accountability system in special education would retain the existing legal guarantees of diagnosis and services for students with disabilities at the front end of the special education process. However, the system for determining whether schools had met their obligations would focus on outcomes rather than on a strict detailing of services rendered. The hundreds of postdiagnosis procedural requirements and directives that are fixed in law or agency regulations—such as the requirements that most special education students spend 80 percent of their time in regular classrooms or that all students with disabilities have their hearing checked frequently—would be replaced by the simple dictate that schools demonstrate concretely that students are benefiting from their special education or modify the educational intervention accordingly. Education officials would still face incentives to mainstream and to regularly test student hearing, but only for the students who are likely to benefit from those approaches. The move to a results-based accountability system would entail a switch from the guarantee of a "free and *appropriate* education" to an assurance of a "free and *effective* education."

A results-based accountability system in special education would have the following specific features:

- Every student's IEP would set forth clearly: 1) what skills and knowledge the student is supposed to acquire; 2) over how long a period; 3) what specific tests would be used to measure those skills; and 4) with what specific testing accommodations.

- The tests and accommodations for each student would be applied consistently, year after year, for all students

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with nondegenerative disabilities.

- The process would begin with a set of baseline tests to measure initial levels of ability and achievement soon after the student has been diagnosed with a disability.

- Subsequent results would be reported as gains or losses from that baseline, noting also whether the outcomes exceed, meet, or fall short of the benchmarks established in the IEP.

- Reports also would include narratives from the teachers, counselors, and administrators who are educating the student, in order to place the gains or losses in context.

- Evidence of aggregate declines in the performance of the special education students in a given district would lead to a state or federally led intervention involving supervised programmatic changes.

- Persistent performance declines or a chronic failure to achieve sufficient progress at the individual, school, or district level would enable the parents of special education students to enroll their children in another public or private school of their choosing, with each child's entire per-pupil spending (regular and special education) following her to the chosen school.

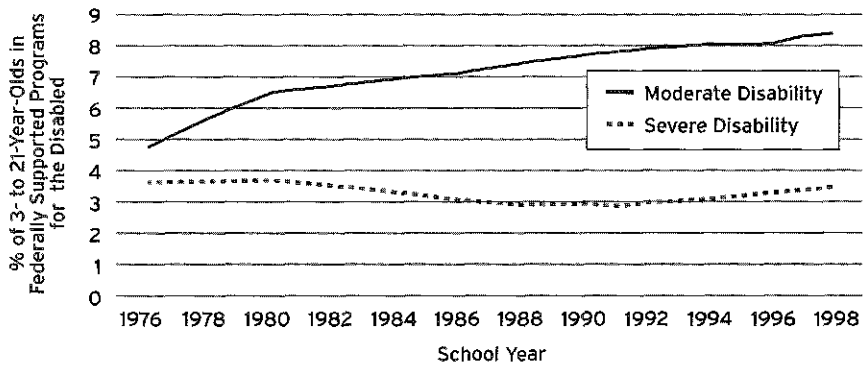
Two elements of this proposal stand out. First, using gain scores along with benchmark achievement assessments is critical. Special education students are, well, "special." They exhibit various handicapping conditions of varied severity that affect their educational ability and achievement. By using the metric of student-specific academic gains instead of a somewhat arbitrary standard of achievement to evaluate special education students, the system would automatically control for a number of preexisting conditions that are particular to each student.

The use of gain scores also minimizes the incentives for classifying a nondisabled student as disabled, since such scores measure individual progress instead of lowering the achievement bar. A school with a 3rd grade student who was never taught to read would not be able to excuse itself of responsibility merely by classifying the child as learning disabled and providing him with "services." If the school adopted that dubious approach under a results-based accountability regime, the student's current ability level would need to be assessed and the school would be required to demonstrate that the child was making adequate yearly progress as determined by an annual assessment using the same testing accommodations. The school still would have to teach the child to read or face the consequences. Moreover, the gain-score results generated from the annual testing program would provide valuable feedback to educators regarding which LD students are responding favorably to interventions tailored to the special needs of LD students and which are not (and therefore may not really be LD). An inaccurate diagnosis of LD therefore becomes a liability to a school, where it might once have served as a cop-out.

Second, greater customer choice is likely to enhance accountability in special education. Experimental customer choice programs, such as public housing vouchers, have demonstrated that choice initiates a flight to quality. The behavior of customers who have choices provides important feedback to decisionmakers, helping them invest more money and effort in what works and waste fewer resources on what fails. The power of parents to move their disabled child out of a failing program

Rising Tide (Figure 2)

During the past 25 years, the increasing number of children diagnosed with specific learning disabilities has led to a doubling in the percentage of all children classified as having a moderate disability.



Moderate disabilities: specific learning disabilities and speech/language impairments.
Severe disabilities: mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, visual impairments, and multiple disabilities.

Figures for 1977-79 and 1981-86 have been interpolated.
Includes students served under Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2001

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would likely improve the outcomes for that child and motivate more teachers and administrators to achieve positive results for their students with disabilities. Currently, parents of disabled students who can afford good lawyers or self-financed private schooling generally enjoy such advantages. That opportunity should be available to all families, regardless of income, as the parental right to contest child placements should be replaced with the parental power to choose an alternative educational environment when the current one isn't working.

Here is how such a program might work in the hypothetical case of a bright 1st grader just diagnosed with severe ADHD. His initial IEP meeting includes a discussion of the seemingly best intervention program for him, but participants also spend considerable time reaching agreement as to what educational goals he should be expected to achieve and how progress toward those goals should be assessed on an annual basis. The primary goal is that he demonstrate gains of at least .8 grade level in the first year and 1.0 grade level in all subsequent years of his schooling. To ensure an accurate assessment of performance, he is to take the same annual achievement test as his peers, individually administered in a separate room, with 20 percent extra time and three times as many breaks. The accommodations are to remain consistent every year, even if the student leaves special education. The IEP also establishes a measurable behavioral goal of five-minute annual increases in the amount of time he is able to remain in his seat in class, as measured observationally.

Say the results of his first-year evaluation are disappointing, confirming the sense of his parents and teachers that the special education intervention program wasn't the best fit for his needs after all. Fearing a second year of disappointing results, and the subsequent risk of the child's transferring to a different school, his teachers try a novel approach, a computerized math instruction program, since the assessments indicated that he was the furthest behind in math. The results are better in the second and subsequent years. Special education is demonstrably working for this child.

The power of parents to move their disabled child out of a failing program would likely improve the outcomes for that child.

The real world that most students with disabilities will eventually enter is filled with "tests" that they will need to take and, one hopes, pass.

The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education recently endorsed many elements of this vision for special education reform. Its primary recommendation is that the accountability system for special education be redesigned to focus on educational outcomes. To realize that goal, the commission urged the Department of Education to reduce its focus on monitoring a large number of postdiagnosis procedural requirements and instead concentrate on "a much smaller number of substantive measures guided by broad federal standards that focus on performance and results." It recommends that many procedure-monitoring staff positions at the Department of Education be redesigned as positions of technical assistance to the states and localities in implementing effective results-based accountability in special education.

Answering the Critics

Critics of results-based accountability in special education typically raise four objections. They argue that it puts too much pressure on the disabled child, generates unreliable performance numbers, wastes resources that would be better spent on services for youngsters, and is unnecessary in light of changes to federal law as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Let's deal with each in turn.

First, results-based accountability need not unduly pressure students with disabilities. By establishing the appropriate testing system and accommodations in each student's IEP, we could ensure that no special education child is saddled with an overly aggressive testing program. The real world that most students with disabilities aspire to and will eventually enter is filled with "tests" that they will need to take and, one hopes, pass. Shielding them from the reality of testing while they are being educated will only do them harm. If learning test-taking skills enhances the performance of nondisabled students on tests, then learning test-taking skills improves the life prospects of students with disabilities, too.

Second, test scores *can* be reliable measures of educational achievement. Much of the lack of reliability is due to modifications in testing conditions. That is why the

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IDEA '97 approach to testing students with disabilities is a recipe for inconsistency, since it allows local administrators to alter testing conditions for students over time. Although test scores are not perfectly reliable indicators of achievement, a student's previous year's test score is consistently the best predictor of the student's current test scores. Including narrative evaluative comments by a student's teachers and aides can explain legitimate reasons for any large fluctuations. Finally, by focusing on general trends, as opposed to merely year-to-year variations, assessments can more accurately capture the systemic performance of schools, districts, and states in educating their students with disabilities.

Third, the resources needed to build a results-based accountability system would not be excessive. Teachers, administrators, and researchers have stated time and again that today's procedural accountability system in special education consumes massive amounts of time and money. If lawmakers were to embrace a results-based accountability system, the record of testing and progress could then replace the record of procedures and services. The net effect of substituting test results for paperwork is almost certain to result in a significant gain in time and money that can be directed toward classroom instruction, tutoring, therapy, and other services.

Fourth, the No Child Left Behind Act, which provides sanctions for schools that fail to educate disabled children, creates strong incentives to take advantage of the many waivers now present in the IDEA to excuse disabled students from testing or to modify their testing accommodations in ways that are likely to generate artificially positive results. Absent the sorts of safeguards that I have proposed, the accountability mechanisms of No Child Left Behind will be insufficient to guarantee results-based accountability in special education.

A sound results-based accountability system could even attract more funding to special education. Congressman Pete Stark (D-Calif.) has introduced legislation to reward improved special education results at the state and local level with increased funding from the federal government. Federal funding is important to the success of special education, since the costs of educating even a few severely disabled students can squeeze the finances of any district, but especially small districts. Congressman Stark's proposal is a laudable attempt to permit states and localities to earn their way to full federal funding in special education, through demonstrated results.

Conclusion

Special education has often been described as a "third rail" of policy reform. Because the current system, with all of its flaws, ensures that many of America's most vulnerable children are given access to special services and, whenever possible, significant exposure to a regular educational environment, parents and advocates oppose reforms because they fear losing the opportunities that children now have. Analysts and reformers tend to focus on the shortcomings of the system, and in so doing they risk being characterized as opponents of children with disabilities. Not surprisingly, special education reformers tend to keep quiet. Thus, the clarion call for reform that has come from liberal and conservative think tanks, respected members of the academy, Republican and Democratic members of Congress, and a bipartisan presidential commission should give us pause. Although the political conditions may not be ripe for major policy reform in special education this year, there is a growing consensus that we can and must design a better system for diagnosing, educating, and verifying the educational progress of special education students.

Legal rights to a special education program for students with disabilities must be preserved, but the specific content of a given student's program ought to be guided by evidence about what is and isn't working for the child, not "one-size-fits-all" mandates from federal, state, and local regulators.

A results-based accountability system would allow special education teachers and administrators to spend more time tracking each student's progress (and using that information to generate even more progress) and less time holding meetings and completing paperwork. Program overseers, legislators, and the general public would have a clearer idea of the extent to which the $50 billion special education system is working. Parents would know more about how their own children are doing in special education and when a dramatic change is needed. As a result of such information, more resources would be invested in the system and more wisely. Perhaps we would inch closer to the vision of what we want to achieve in terms of educating students with disabilities. At a minimum we would have a clearer idea of how much further we need to go. That alone would be a dramatic improvement.

–Patrick J. Wolf is an assistant professor of public policy at Georgetown University and a former lobbyist for people with hearing impairments.

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REACHING THE IDEAL

Special education has its problems, *but they mainly follow from the failure of schools to comply fully with the law*

THE ACCOUNTABILITY movement has been gathering steam for more than a decade now, so it was perhaps only a matter of time before reformers began trying to apply the standards-and-testing template to special education. Patrick Wolf (see "Sisyphean Tasks" on page 24) has urged a shift from what he calls the "process" or "compliance" orientation of special education to an accountability regime that focuses on achievement gains. Now the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education has headed in that direction too, writing, "The current system often places process above results, and bureaucratic compliance above student achievement, excellence, and outcomes." Nevertheless, the commission maintained, "The law must retain the legal and procedural safeguards necessary to guarantee a 'free appropriate public education' to children with disabilities." The challenge is to retain the legal rights and simultaneously move toward a different kind of accountability.

The current system of procedural accountability within special education law is a logical response to the problems that led Congress in 1975 to enact the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA): the total exclusion of some students with disabilities, the inadequate education of others, and the segregation of those in school from their nondisabled peers. At the time, holding educators accountable meant using the civil-rights approach of guaranteeing access to schools and to special services. To ensure access and benefit, Congress adopted two approaches. First, it gave parents the right to participate with educators in making decisions about their children's education; the President's Commission not only endorsed that approach, but also wants to strengthen parents' "empowerment" rights. Second, it gave parents and schools the right to go to an administrative hearing (and then on appeal to courts) on any issue related to the child's right to a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive setting.

by RUD TURNBULL & ANN P. TURNBULL

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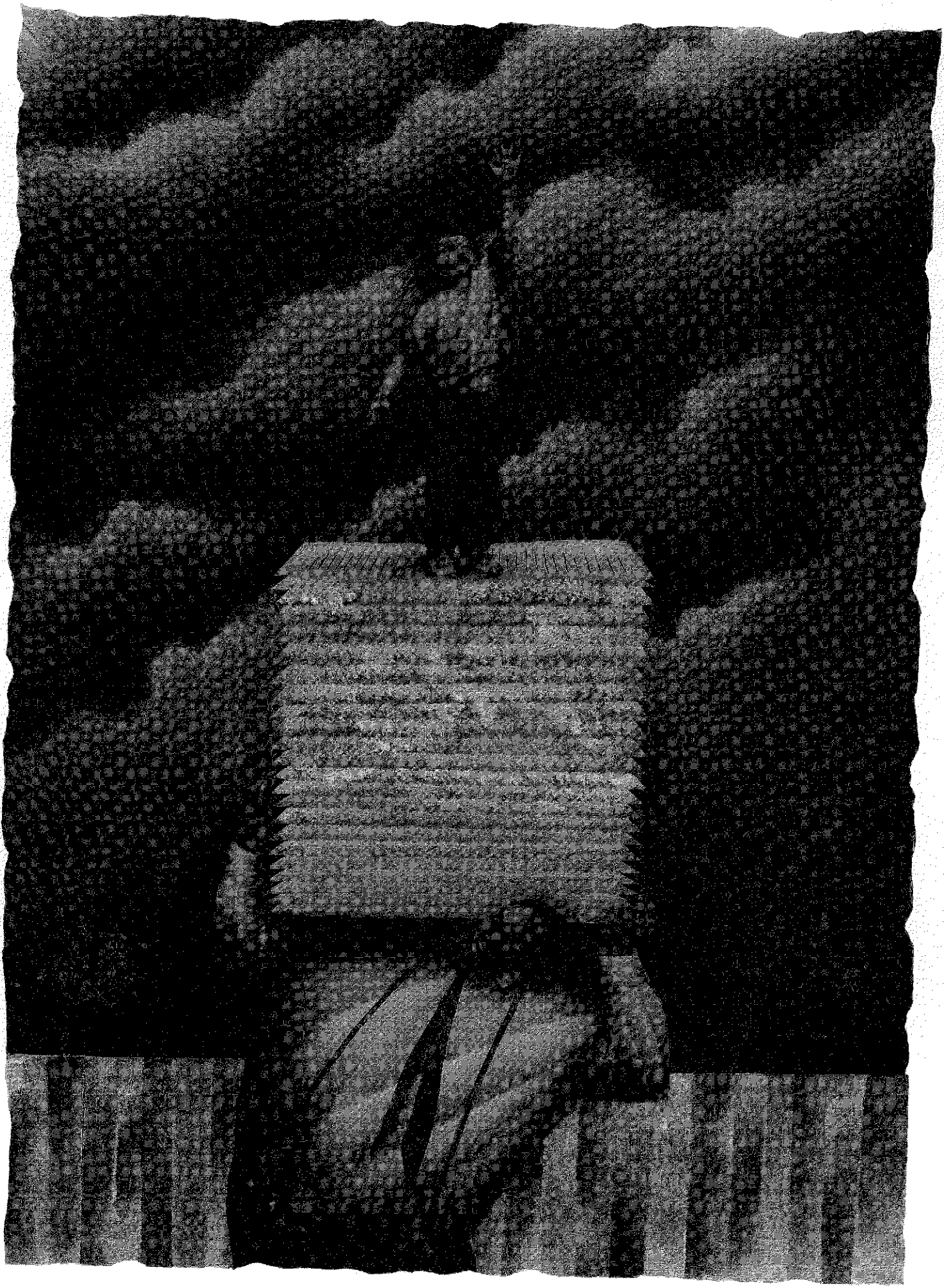

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It is crucial to recognize just how successful IDEA and these accountability techniques have been. They have brought the majority of students with disabilities into the general education system. They have created a cadre of parents, parent organizations, special educators, and other educators who know students' rights and how to educate students effectively. They have brought intellectual and financial resources to bear on the problems of teaching children with disabilities. And they have given us the opportunity, indeed the duty, to advocate for different and more meaningful results.

To so advocate does not mean abandoning the rights that Congress conferred more than 25 years ago. It does mean moving beyond process accountability without jettisoning the procedures that empower parents to participate in their children's education and that give them (and schools) the right to resolve their differences in quasi-legal and legal proceedings. And it means preserving the six principles of IDEA that are its bedrock—principles that derive directly from Congress's declaration that disabled students have a right to a free, appropriate public education with their nondisabled peers. Let's examine those principles, see how they are sometimes ignored in practice, and discuss what an accountability system based on results can do to advance them.

Some schools refuse to identify some students as having a disability in order to hold down the costs associated with special education.

The Six Principles

1) *Zero Reject* is the principle that no student with a disability can be denied a free, appropriate public education. This is both a civil right under the equal protection doctrine and good social policy, grounded in the individual and social utilitarianism of educating all students.

Does every student with a disability have access to education, as some assert? No, not if we recognize that some schools refuse to identify some students as having a disability in order to hold down the costs associated with special education. Some schools instead offer students protection under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (which provides fewer rights than IDEA). Some schools shunt students into the juvenile justice system in order to escape their duty to educate them—students who could benefit from staying in school if only the educators held a positive view of their potential and had the ability to address their cognitive, developmental, emotional, and behavioral needs. Attacks on students' IDEA-guaranteed right to education is a back-door attempt to segregate the schools by excluding students on the basis of their disabilities and ethnic, cultural, or linguistic characteristics. It's time to be candid about the games that some schools play and about the capacities that some schools lack to implement the zero-reject principle. The fault lies not in IDEA, but in administrative gamesmanship and insufficient system capacity. Monitoring based on outcomes must address both of these issues.

2) *Nondiscriminatory Evaluation* is the principle that schools must evaluate each student fairly and without bias to determine if the student has a disability and, if so, to plan what kind of education the student needs in order to benefit from school.

The question, "Does the child have a disability?" is heavily freighted. Policymakers repeatedly disagree over what IDEA does and does not consider a disability. There have been objections to congressional decisions to recognize as covered disabilities such new categories as autism, traumatic brain injury, and attention deficit/hyperactivity. The increase in the number of students classified as having either specific learning disabilities or emotional/behavioral disorders has also sparked much controversy. It is alleged that some students classified as having learning disabilities were simply taught poorly in their early years. Data show that students from some minority populations are overrepresented within the special education population, yet there is insufficient policy to address the fact that poverty and disability go hand in hand.

It is important to resist the pressure to jettison IDEA's present requirements for periodic, multifaceted, culturally unbiased evaluations. No good comes from classifying some children as having a disability when in fact they do not have one or from labeling a child with a disability when the child may experience other kinds of educational disadvantages arising from ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic conditions. Moreover, the pressure to reduce the number of special education students, in part to alleviate education budgets and eviscerate education rights, must be resisted as poor social policy. If a child truly has a disability and cannot for that reason benefit from general education, then the proper response is to offer the benefits of special education. Schools cannot do that unless they adhere to state-of-the-art methods for classifying students; it's not about measuring their progress in school but about deciding whether they have a disability and, if so, what the educational con-

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sequences of that determination are.

But let's confess: classification is a political-economic-cultural tool, not just an educational issue. Its consequences, from both individual and social utilitarian perspectives, are often grave. So, outcome-based monitoring should be directed at whether the evaluations that IDEA requires are performed on time, by competent and disinterested people, in an unbiased way, and with resulting application to the student's educational program and placement. An accountability system that simply monitors the progress of students already in the system will fail to keep track of how students are evaluated and classified in order to enter the system.

3) *Appropriate Education* is the principle that students with disabilities are entitled to benefit from being in school. This principle goes beyond access (the zero-reject rule) and asks whether students are receiving an education that leads to their full participation in American life, that improves their economic capabilities and their ability to live as independently as they want to live.

Of course there are issues. Too much time and paperwork are involved in writing the student's individualized education programs and too little in making sure that the teachers know what to put into the program, can teach its content, and can defend the program on the basis of evidence that the program leads to full participation, economic self-sufficiency, and independent living. But bear in mind that most of the procedural burdens and paperwork requirements are imposed by the states, not the federal Office for Special Education Programs (OSEP). Other problems exist: many students go without the related services from which they can benefit. There are grossly insufficient supplies of qualified/certified general and special educators and related service providers. Schools of education still prepare new teachers using antiquated curricula. The general education curriculum limits access by and for many students with disabilities. Too many outcome-focused policy leaders and school administrators believe that academic achievement is the sole measure of school and student outcomes, despite the fact that IDEA itself acknowledges that students' developmental, emotional, and behavioral capacities/outcomes are a proper focus of a student's program. Too many educators underestimate students' capabilities, often because they are not aware of what can happen when teachers use curricula and instructional techniques that are based on solid research.

The question is not whether schools should be held accountable (they should), but, with respect to students with disabilities, what outcomes they should be accountable for producing. Academic outcomes, of course, but IDEA addresses more than the cognitive capacities of students. It also addresses their emotional, physical, and developmental capacities, and schools should be held accountable for enhancing these and for connecting them to a student's opportunities for full participation in American life: economic self-sufficiency, equal opportunity, and independent living. IDEA addresses the student's quality of life, a measurable outcome that incorporates academic outcomes. That is the outcome for which schools ultimately should be held responsible. An appropriate education depends on genuine and sustained efforts at capacity-building at the federal, state, and local levels. Accountability measures should inquire into whether schools are taking the steps that research shows can lead to an appropriate, holistic education, not just an academic outcome.

4) *Least Restrictive Environment* is the principle that students with disabilities, to the greatest degree possible, must have access to the general curriculum and be taught with their nondisabled peers. This principle is based on the idea that classrooms that include both disabled and nondisabled students provide a more appropriate and beneficial environment for the disabled student, who has greater opportunity to associate with nondisabled peers, and nondisabled students learn that those with disabilities are no less worthy as individuals.

Bear in mind, however, that education is more than the academic curriculum. It includes the extracurricular life of a school and the school's other activities—a fact that is relevant in considering Wolf's results-based accountability approach, which is almost exclusively targeted at the academic domain.

The evidence is persuasive: students with disabilities can learn and develop at least as much and often more when they are included in general education. The extent of a particular student's disability can sometimes justify placement outside the general curriculum; that's why IDEA provides for an array of services inside or outside of general education.

All too often, it is simply a lack of will and capacity that limits educators' ability to adhere to this principle of inclusion. There is a large body of literature about how to include students with disabilities in general education. To monitor compliance with this principle requires holding schools accountable for sustained capacity-building that demonstrably moves all students into general education.

5) *Procedural Due Process* is the principle that students with disabilities and their parents have the right to be informed of changes to their educational plan, to participate in the decisionmaking process surrounding the design and

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updating of those plans, and to protest any decisions that are adverse to their right to a free, appropriate public education by going to an administrative hearing and then to appeal to a court any adverse judgment. (By the way: the schools have the same rights to protest a parent's decision about a child's education. Moreover, schools are now resorting to a clever bypass of the hearing route, accusing parents of neglect if they do not concur with schools' decisions.) This principle—especially its manifestation in hearings—has become the most controversial one of all.

The question is not whether there should be procedural safeguards. There must be, as a matter of constitutional law. Instead, it is whether the ones that IDEA now contains should be substantially modified. They should not be.

Some provisions detailing when parents must be notified of changes to the plan might be abbreviated (although we are not convinced that even the present notices sufficiently inform all parents of their and their children's rights). But the "stay put" provisions that protect disabled students who are being subjected to disciplinary action should remain, especially since some schools do not yet have the capacity to correctly implement the provisions intended to help schools cope with disruptive behavior. The other procedural safeguards—parents' rights to mediation, administrative hearings, and judicial appeal, and their right to recover attorneys' fees—are necessary to ensure that the systemic problems under the other IDEA principles can be remedied. In 1998, just under 0.02 percent of all parents filed complaints or went to any kinds of hearings; about the same number went to mediation. Schools prevail in 60 to 80 percent of the hearings. A reformed monitoring system should document what the nature of the complaints are, what can be done to remedy them, and, as the President's Commission pointed out, what early-intervention strategies can be used to head off complaints before they harden into administrative or legal grievances. Preventive monitoring is what schools and parents need.

6) *Parental Participation* is the principle that parents and students (when they reach a mature age) have the right to participate in decisions about the students' education. This is a fundamental rule of democratic decisionmaking. Moreover, it is a powerful technique for accountability. As such, it should be preserved. Yes, there are problems—principally, the imbalance in power and resources between educators on the one hand and parents on the other (especially parents from underserved populations). But these are remediable, especially if accountability and compliance measurements address whether parents really do have access to decisionmaking processes at the student level and at the school and state levels. Simply testing for academic progress doesn't accomplish this. If "leave no child behind" is good policy, then "leave no parent behind" must also be good policy. Indeed, at a time when parents are being admonished to develop their children's emotional and social intelligences as much as their academic ones, it may well undermine parents' confidence in a results-based accountability system if all that system does is measure academic outcomes.

A short-sighted view is that academic outcomes alone matter and that performance on tests is the only measure worth applying.

The Complexity of Compliance

The question confronting those interested in accountability is this: How can federal, state, and local agencies ensure that schools actually do the job that IDEA authorizes and commands them to do?

In answering that, let's embrace the complexity of compliance and begin by bearing in mind that the defederalization of education that began in the Reagan administration has had serious consequences: the federal agency charged with monitoring the states is hard-pressed to monitor by any means other than to determine whether the state and local education agencies dotted each "i" and crossed each "t" in a student's educational plan. It is fruitless to talk about a different system of monitoring—about moving from procedural monitoring to academic-based outcomes—when neither the federal nor many state agencies are geared up to do that. Again, it's a matter of building the system's capacity and of knowing what is worth monitoring.

Remember, too, that Congress limits state education agencies to taking 5 percent of special education funds for administrative tasks. That vitiates their ability to monitor except for procedural compliance (though it has the off-setting benefit of passing funds through to schools and service providers).

Then there is the fact that in the first case to go to the Supreme Court under the special education law, *Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982), the Court ruled that the way to ensure students' receiving an "appropriate" education was to follow proper procedures. This led federal and state agencies to focus on procedural

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compliance instead of on the Court's equally important holding that "opportunity to benefit" is an indispensable component of an appropriate education. Is it any wonder that Congress, in the 1997 reauthorization, shifted stakeholders' focus from process to outcomes by adding provisions that require disabled students to participate in state and district testing programs?

What other problems exist? Too much paperwork (look to the states, not just OSEP, to reduce their demands); fear of litigation and an alleged (but nonexistent) plethora of due-process hearings (see above); allegations that parents and their allies harass schools for their own sake, not the children's (again, where is that evidence?); the lack of a "culture of accountability"; and the reluctance of state and local agencies to be assessed for student progress. Yes, all of these factors are in play.

Schools, like other public and quasi-public institutions, have resisted outcome-based measurements. The Government Performance Reform Act began to challenge that resistance; so, too, did taxpayer revolts and devolution ideologies and, in recent years, a stagnant public economy. Congress itself challenged the resistance to a culture of accountability when it added the assessment provisions in the 1997 IDEA reauthorization and when, beginning with the "Goals 2000" launching, it amended general education laws to press for accountability for all students' benefit.

Accountability, Structure, and Trust

But here's the harsh rub: To have accountability, one must have a legal structure within which those who are held accountable—schools, students, parents, and institutions of higher education—can function; and the structure must integrate the federal, state, and local agencies and be aligned with other education laws and initiatives. Accountability without structure simply does not make sense, and that is why we must not jettison IDEA's assurances of "zero reject," fair evaluation, appropriate education, access to the general curriculum, procedural safeguards, and parent empowerment. The present legal structure is solid; attempts to undermine it are unwarranted. What must be addressed is the law's implementation.

There one finds problems, some of which we have identified. The call for "outcomes" is certainly warranted, and perhaps some of the techniques that Wolf has suggested will be useful. But let's pause a moment to ask two questions.

First, what outcomes, for what ends, and how measured? There can be no doubt: academic outcomes are important for all students with disabilities because they are the means to other kinds of outcomes. What other kinds of outcomes? Here, IDEA and the disability field are clear: people with disabilities must have equal opportunities to participate with nondisabled people in all sectors of American life (IDEA is a civil-rights law, not just an education law), so they can fully participate in American communities, so they can be economically self-sufficient, and so they can live independently—all according to their abilities and choices to do so. A short-sighted view—the one that pervades the school-reform ideology—is that academic outcomes alone matter and that performance on tests is the only measure worth applying. We disagree: there is more to a student's life than brainpower. The role of special education, indeed of all education, should not be so narrowly defined. Accountability must be addressed more holistically. To fail to do that is to fail people with disabilities and, in the long run, the public interest.

Second, student outcomes will always fall short when schools themselves are short of resources and will. Wolf and his colleague Bryan Hassel have called for a "big toolbox" of talents and strategies, including incentives for student and educator performance, goal-setting up and down the federal-state-local system, and consequences for underperformance. Fine, but that's not enough. Why? Because the toolbox and similar approaches do not frontally address the capacity of the schools and educators to deliver an appropriate education. In nearly all of the public debate about accountability, there is not enough to be heard about the use of research-based curricula and instructional techniques. Incentives, goal-setting, and consequences will have little effect on education and outcomes unless teachers use approaches that have been validated by research. The flaw is not in the law. The cure is not an accountability toolbox alone. The flaw is in the inadequate system for training teachers, for ensuring that they use research-based instructional techniques, and for holding them accountable for a much broader range of outcomes than merely academic ones.

The cure lies in preserving IDEA's six principles, in relying on more than process compliance, and in being serious about effective education by using research-based approaches. The "residual" rights that Wolf wants—identifying and evaluating students, setting year-by-year goals for student learning, assessing student progress toward those goals, and informing and involving parents—simply are not enough.

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Political EDUCATOR

PAUL VALLAS became the nation's most sought-after superintendent by bringing order and energy to Chicago's moribund school system

A STEADY TRICKLE OF WELL-WISHERS APPROACH FORMER CHICAGO schools superintendent Paul Vallas during a quiet morning at Petro's, the Greek-run downtown coffee shop where Vallas is holding forth. Some congratulate him, some thank him for putting in a good word at a selective parochial school, some ask after his family, and some make sure he's got enough coffee.

Vallas, a famously tireless worker, has had a busy year. Since tendering his resignation, Vallas has run for—and only narrowly missed becoming—the Democratic nominee for Illinois governor. He has spoken at venues across the country, including talks before the U.S. Congress and the city council of New York City. He has consulted to Britain's Tony Blair. And at one point he was simultaneously in the running for three high-profile jobs: chancellor of the New York City schools, CEO of the Philadelphia schools, and Illinois state superintendent of education. He has since accepted the job heading the turbulent Philadelphia school system, where tensions between the city and state have been escalating for years and Edison Schools, Inc., has taken responsibility for running 20 schools (see Jay Mathews's article, "The Philadelphia Experiment" on page 50).

PHOTOGRAPH BY LISA GODFREY

The Vallas Legend

Perhaps the most prominent big-city superintendent in the nation, Vallas is widely credited with having turned around the Chicago school system. Before his arrival in 1995, the Chicago schools had been labeled by William Bennett, the secretary of education in the Reagan administration, as the "worst in the nation." And the label may have fit. Teacher strikes had become common, the district was on

by ALEXANDER RUSSO

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During his tenure as CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, from 1995 to 2001, Paul Vallas racked up a long string of accomplishments that would be the envy of nearly any school superintendent.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AP/WORLDWIDE PHOTOS

the brink of ruin financially, academic performance was abysmal, and school facilities were crumbling.

During his tenure, from 1995 to 2001, Vallas racked up a long string of accomplishments that would be the envy of nearly any superintendent. The budget was quickly put in order. Vallas rehabbed old schools and built attractive new ones. Test scores reported to the public rose nearly every year, two union contracts were negotiated without any strikes, and a host of new programs—summer school, afterschool programs, alternative schools, new magnet programs—were all created. Most important, for perhaps the first time in Chicago's history, low-performing schools were pressured to do better, and students and their parents encountered a system that did not just pass everyone through regardless of what they learned.

Not surprisingly, acclaim poured in for Chicago's turnaround and Vallas's leadership. A Clinton administration favorite, Chicago was twice cited in state of the union speeches. Glowing profiles of Vallas appeared in glossy magazines, and he was given numerous business and education awards. Crossing party lines, he was invited to be part of the Bush administration's transition team. Public opinion polls—paid for by Vallas through the school board—showed support for Vallas that sometimes beat the mayor's approval ratings.

To most outside observers, the ingredients of the Chicago formula for success seemed clear: mayoral control, a nontraditional superintendent, and a strong emphasis on accountability. But other, less-heralded attributes helped just as much, including provisions in the state's 1995 legislation that greatly expanded Vallas's power over teachers and schools; school construction and other appealing initiatives undertaken in part to soften the accountability focus; and characteristics in Vallas that aren't necessarily the trademark of the latest fashion, the big-city superintendent who rides in from another walk of life.

More than a Mayoral Takeover

Vallas's tenure was directly preceded—and made possible—by Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley's 1995 takeover of the city's school district. Vallas's accomplishments, in turn, were aided immensely by the political muscle and resources Daley put into school reform.

First Daley moved two of his key aides, Vallas and Gery Chico, from City Hall to the school district, with more than 100 others in tow. Vallas became the school district's CEO, Chico the president of the school board. In the beginning, Vallas reportedly spent two days a week in the mayor's offices. Shortly

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thereafter, he abandoned the Board of Education complex on distant Pershing Avenue and moved the board headquarters downtown—just a block from City Hall. An extremely tight-knit team nicknamed "The Three Musketeers" by some, the Vallas-Chico-Daley triumvirate heralded rising test scores together and fended off efforts to drive wedges between them. Having these three intelligent and ambitious men working on school improvement was a powerful symbol for change. The team was effective in lobbying downstate for increased funds, and with bond houses as well. Almost overnight, the schools became one of the city's top priorities.

These changes weren't really the result of a "mayoral takeover" in the traditional sense. Chicago hasn't had an independent elected school board in at least 100 years. The 1995 law simply reduced the board's size, gave Mayor Daley the right to appoint anyone to the board instead of picking from a community-generated list, and granted him the right to pick a schools' chief. The powerful local school councils, a vestige of Chicago's 1980s reform approach, "site-based management," remained in place.

The 1995 legislation also gave the school board sweeping new powers over individual schools and principals, allowing the board to take over local schools that were in crisis. In addition, the law block-granted several state and local funding streams, giving the board much more flexibility to fund its initiatives. And the law curtailed the rights of the teachers union that had long limited what Chicago superintendents could do, regardless of who appointed them. Chicago teachers were prohibited from striking for at least 18 months and banned from bargaining on a number of issues, including charter schools, privatization, and class schedules—provisions they are still seeking to overturn seven years later.

"The legislation cleared enormous brush piles away," says Linda Lenz, publisher of *Catalyst*, an independent Chicago education magazine. Billed largely as the Republican-controlled state legislature's effort to create problems for Daley, the 1995 law did much more than simply give Daley the keys to the building. In fact, Daley insisted on additional controls that would give him some chance of success.

Vallas too was more than just a nontraditional superintendent. For ten years Vallas directed the budget arm of the state legislature in Springfield. For the five years preceding his job as schools' chief, he was the city's budget director, administering his own $2.5 million budget and overseeing the city's $3.5 billion in spending. These skills certainly helped him in many ways. Budgets were a snap for him, large bureaucracies were not intimidating, and he had no previous allegiances within the school system to hold him back from asking hard questions or demanding new solutions.

In short, unlike the corporate or military leaders normally envisioned as candidates to head urban school systems, Vallas was neither an outsider to Chicago nor unfamiliar with schools and large public agencies. Son of Greek immigrants, native Chicagoan, a long-time political staffer with close ties to City Hall, Vallas was a total political insider whose entire professional life had been in politics—the Chicago equivalent of President George W. Bush's putting staffers like Andrew Card or Karl Rove in charge of the Department of Homeland Security. (Indeed, Vallas's lack of insider status may be a significant obstacle to his ability to achieve equal success in Philadelphia.)

VALLAS, unlike many nontraditional superintendents, was neither an outsider to Chicago nor unfamiliar with schools and large public agencies.

In addition, there just aren't many people like Paul Vallas around. Tall and ungainly, Vallas is nonetheless a charming, intellectually imposing man, a charismatic bully. In many situations, he simply steamrolls most of those around him (including the state Democratic party, which he almost upset single-handedly by stealing the gubernatorial primary from Congressman Rod Blagojevich). He does what he wants—sometimes rashly—and bristles at any whiff of opposition. Known to berate underlings, educators, and members of the press alike, Vallas has a leadership style that seems more a product of his Greek roots and intellect than of any management book or bureaucratic experience.

Self-assured and capable of torrential speech, Vallas only rarely admits to doubt or fault. "The job was easier than I thought it was going to be," Vallas recalls, walking briskly on a sunny weekday shortly before his appointment as Philadelphia schools CEO was announced. "The honeymoon never ended."

How could you replicate that, even if you wanted to? As CEO of the Chicago schools, Vallas combined Rudy Giuliani's gruff exterior and stunning self-confidence with a Bill Clinton–like mastery of policy minutiae and John McCain's open door to a fawning, half-intimidated press. He held regular press conferences, called back reporters at all hours of the night, and spoke in commanding detail about specific schools and neighborhoods. In fear as much as in admiration, educators worked day and night to please him, to find ways to get done the things that he wanted. The result was a stream of positive press coverage, growing public confidence in the schools, and renewed energy within the school system. Under Vallas,

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Though the city school system was officially limited to just 15 charters, VALLAS found creative ways to cluster different campuses together under a single charter.

"People started feeling better about signs of progress," reports Victoria Chou, dean of the school of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "A lot more people began trying very hard to sustain this difficult work."

More than Accountability

On a policy level, Vallas's efforts to bring strong accountability to Chicago schools were his signature approach. In short order, he declared that students whose scores did not reach a certain level on standardized tests would be required to go to summer school and could be held back a year. Schools that did not bring their average reading and math scores above a certain level were put on probation and threatened with a series of interventions. Under this program, tens of thousands of students were required to attend summer school, thousands who did not master basic skills were held back rather than being promoted as was traditional in most school systems, and more than 100 schools were put on probation for low test scores.

Here again, however, the conventional wisdom fails to explain the whole story. First of all, accountability was not the only thing going on during the Vallas years. Other initiatives, while less prominent at the national level, made significant contributions to improvements and balanced the harshness of the Vallas accountability regime. Less noted outside of Chicago, but just as important, was a massive capital improvement campaign that accompanied the push for academic accountability. Facing a dilapidated set of facilities that discouraged academic improvement and scared off middle-class parents, Vallas and the equally ambitious Chico, who recently announced his intention to run for the U.S. Senate, embarked on a $2.5 billion school construction and renovation program that was at one point the largest building project in the nation, according to Vallas. Building new schools and renovating old ones was an important, concrete representation of the hard work going on inside the schools. Though the city school system was officially limited to just 15 charters, Vallas also found creative ways to cluster different campuses together under a single charter, eventually funding more than 40 different schools throughout the city.

Premature Departure

Vallas lasted six years—a veteran among big-city superintendents, but still shorter than one might have expected for a CEO who had been the subject of so much praise. The explanation for his departure is part politics, part ego, and part Vallas.

In his last year, the signs were increasingly clear that Vallas's tenure was in trouble. The mayor became much more openly critical of the schools for failing to make ongoing progress and started announcing his own initiatives and events, including a citywide reading summit to which Vallas was barely invited. A much-heralded mayoral effort to increase first-day attendance and encourage parents to bring their children to school turned into a fiasco. Meanwhile, rumors about Vallas's possibly running for governor kept circulating, and his name mysteriously appeared on a list of possible education secretaries in the new Bush administration. Vallas antagonist Debbie Lynch defeated Vallas's long-standing ally Tom Reese for the teacher union presidency, running on an anti-Vallas platform. With Chico departing, test scores flatlining, and having lost favor with the mayor, there was no real way for Vallas to stay. While Vallas continues to claim that he left Chicago voluntarily, most everyone else knows better.

The most obvious political explanation for his departure was that, from the mayor's perspective, Vallas grew too big for his britches. Like many other deputies before him—remember Rudy Giuliani's famed police commissioner, William Bratton—too much adulation can become a problem. Daley is famous in Chicago for firing staffers who steal his headlines, and he replaced Vallas with 36-year-old Arne Duncan, an unknown.

"Vallas fatigue" may also have played a role in constraining Vallas, who was nearly always battling someone or something. During his time as schools chief, he took on the reform groups, the local school councils, the education schools, the state board of education, and the education research community. His verbal attacks on teachers and the teacher union were not matched by any significant attempts to address problems with teacher quality. At one point he threatened to cancel all field trips. At another he threatened not to participate in the state's testing program. The public ate it up, but that kind of endless battle could last only so long.

Substantively, many cite policy churn—the surfeit of programs and the lack of quality implementation—as a major problem. Vallas tried to do everything, from social services to extended-day programs. "He would dump a little bit of money in them, he would get a lot of press, and then they were left alone," says Chou. "It would have been better to have had three

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or four initiatives, take some time, and stay with them. His way drained resources and energy."

Vallas says that there were simply "lots of things to do," like providing eyeglasses for the 27,000 students who were shown to need them by a Vallas-inspired vision screening program. Typically, Vallas turns the criticism back on his critics. "Others may not be able to chew gum and walk at the same time," says Vallas, "but I can." To many educators, however, the effect was like a Christmas-tree school system, with too many policy ornaments and not enough follow-through.

VALLAS rarely sought the big-picture educational wisdom that he needed once the budget was balanced.

The Vision Thing

Underlying these mundane and bureaucratic reasons may be the fact that, beyond imposing accountability, Vallas lacked a sophisticated or flexible education vision, or ready access to one. Over and again during his last year, the mayor called on Vallas for new ideas, to "think outside the box."

After cleaning things up and implementing his accountability plan, many think that Vallas didn't have more to give. "While Vallas may have been the right choice to clean up the administrative act immediately, he really doesn't have the skills to do academic improvement," says Dorothy Shipps, a Columbia University education professor who served for three years as one of the directors of the University of Chicago–based Consortium for Chicago School Research. She echoes a sentiment expressed by many. Academic improvement is "just not a matter of yelling louder or applying the sanctions harder," Shipps says.

However, others think that Vallas's aggressive focus on accountability was necessary and appropriate. "I think he moved the system forward in a couple of ways," says John Ayers, executive director of the business-affiliated Leadership for Quality Education in Chicago. "He was constantly trying to get to yes, which is the opposite of the typical school administrator." According to Ayers, accountability measures implemented in the mid-1990s should not be judged by today's standards. "All the accountability efforts look more flawed now than they did then," he says. "Remember, this was the first attempt of a major system to create accountability."

For all his success, Vallas is at heart a top-down manager who rarely sought the big-picture educational wisdom that he needed once the budget was balanced. Unlike cities like Boston, where Mayor Thomas Menino installed Thomas Payzant, a nationally known education leader, or San Diego, where former federal prosecutor turned schools chief Alan Bersin brought in the big education guns in the form of New York City's Tony Alvarado (who some say would have joined Vallas if he had asked), Vallas rarely availed himself of that kind of advice. Deeply suspicious of the reform groups whom he says "exploited" failing schools, critical of ed-school policy experts, and antagonistic toward the independent research shop set up at the University of Chicago, Vallas seems to have been focused on political and managerial rather than educational priorities. Even after six years running the Chicago schools, Vallas still talks about time on task rather than methods or quality: more kindergarten, double periods of reading for struggling students, summer school, mandatory extended day.

It is also worth noting that serious flaws in the Vallas accountability system were apparent almost at once, and they were only slowly addressed. Vallas had based his accountability system almost entirely on what percentage of all students scored at or above national averages on the norm-referenced Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Vallas claims that broader measures and progress indicators were always a part of his system, but few others recall such a balanced approach. For better or worse, the Iowa test scores became "the one thing that everyone looked at," according to DePaul University education professor Barbara Radner, director of DePaul's Center for Urban Education, even as the state haltingly developed its own standards and testing system. The use of district-determined cut scores as the sole determinant of whether most students were promoted to the next grade struck many as narrow and arbitrary. And Vallas's decision to put more than 100 schools on probation one year and to intervene at seven particularly troubled high schools shortly thereafter overwhelmed the district's ability to give these schools any meaningful help.

Moreover, the Vallas focus on accountability meant that several other needs went largely unaddressed. Vallas was famous for creating new programs, but not as well known for quality implementation or for addressing the most difficult classroom learning problems. Professional development is one example where only now, two years into the Duncan regime, the district is focusing significant attention.

"I don't know if the mayor was as impatient with the reading scores as he was with the sterility of our schools," says DePaul's Radner. "I think the mayor understands that the schools are supposed to be places where kids want to learn."

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THE BIG STICK

School reform in Chicago depended on setting standards and promoting systemwide improvement

by KENNETH K. WONG

IN THE 1980s, site-based management was one of the hottest theories in education. The idea was to drive budget authority and decision-making power down to the school level, allowing those in the trenches to respond to local needs and promoting diversity and flexibility within the system. No longer would edicts be handed down from central-office administrators who were divorced from life in the schools. Few school districts bought into this theory more wholeheartedly than Chicago. In 1988, with the Illinois state legislature's passage of the Chicago School Reform Act, the site-based management theory was joined with the idea that schools would better serve their constituents if the constituents were given more power. The new law created an 11-member local school council at each of the district's 550 schools. The councils were made up of parents of children in the schools and were given the power to hire and fire the school principal and to set budget priorities.

In turn, the power of the central office was diminished. The 1988 reform was based on the idea that the schools didn't need support and intervention from the central office in order to improve on a systemwide basis. Consequently, between 1989 and 1996, the number of staff positions in the central office was reduced by 44 percent, from 4,881 to 2,739. This wasn't just achieved by outsourcing noncore functions like busing and school construction. In the areas of curriculum, instruction, professional development, and related support services, the number of central-office positions was reduced by 45 percent, from 404 to 221. The decentralized management structure was reinforced by an infusion of $53 million from local foundations to support reform at the school level led by the school councils.

However, the decentralized regime didn't fulfill the public's expectations during its seven years of implementation. Even supporters of the local school councils concluded that only about one out of three elementary schools developed the organizational capacity to address educational needs. The achievement trends were inconclusive. For example, one study found that students in 6th grade registered a 42 percent increase in reading performance and a 63 percent increase in math learning between 1991 and 1996. But the reading proficiency of 4th graders regressed by 22 percent during the same period. No progress was observed at the high-school level either; on average, high schools had only 20 percent of their students reading at or above the national average.

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As the first noneducator to take the helm of a large urban district, Vallas inspired a trend in urban school reform across the nation.

The continuing failure of the Chicago Public Schools sparked a complete about-face in 1995, when Mayor Richard Daley took control of the system. Traditionally the school board had been insulated from City Hall, a legacy of Progressive-era reforms that sought to keep politics out of the schoolhouse. In the 1990s, however, a new breed of urban mayor began to see the school system as one of the keys to rebuilding the cities. Mayors like Thomas Menino in Boston, Rudy Giuliani in New York, and Daley in Chicago pushed for authority over the schools. Daley, for one, realized the political risks inherent in taking over a troubled school system. With authority would also come accountability at the ballot box. But his confidence was bolstered by his 1995 reelection, and he was determined to confront the challenge of improving public education in the city.

The mayoral takeover in Chicago heralded a return to a strong central administration. Daley's choice as schools CEO, Paul Vallas, the mayor's former budget director, saw a need to apply accountability standards to all schools and students systemwide. This addressed a key limitation of decentralization—namely, that organizational changes at the school level cannot compel academic improvement across the system. While decentralization may lead to successful reform *in some* schools, systemwide improvement is not likely to occur unless district leadership has the political will and the capacity to implement performance-based accountability. In Vallas's view, district intervention was necessary in schools where principals and teachers by themselves failed to improve student performance over a number of years.

As the first noneducator to take the helm of a large urban district, Vallas inspired a trend in urban school reform across the nation. His leadership in the revitalization of the Chicago school system gave credibility to the idea that one need not have progressed through the school bureaucracy in order to be an effective superintendent. As a result, in recent years cities like New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., have all turned to so-called nontraditional superintendents—lawyers, businessmen, former military officers, politicians—to lead their school systems.

Quality of Life

From the beginning, Vallas and Daley sought to project an image of efficiency and responsibility in building support for their reform efforts. They also campaigned tirelessly to connect school reform to the city's quality of life and

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competitive position. The image of the Chicago Public Schools as a wasteful bureaucracy was aggravated by its continuing financial problems. The district declared bankruptcy in 1979 and subsequently experienced frequent budgetary shortfalls. Vallas's predecessor, for example, was unable to eliminate a $150 million deficit and resorted to borrowing to keep schools operating in 1993 and 1994. Vallas was determined to restore financial solvency. Within his first year as CEO, he was able to eliminate the deficits.

Vallas was also able to redirect resources to support the school system's core functions—teaching and learning. In Vallas's first year, the share of resources devoted to instruction increased from 53 percent to 58 percent of the total budget. At the same time, Vallas contracted out several noncore functions, such as the management and maintenance of school buildings, and provided a list of general contractors from which schools could select firms for custodial, engineering, and construction-related services. The Vallas administration also significantly improved the management of human resources and information in the system.

Vallas's ability to shore up the district's finances and to streamline the central office was aided by two conditions. First, the 1995 school reform act provided the CEO with broad power over financial, managerial, and educational matters. The 1995 law suspended the budget oversight authority of the School Finance Authority (which had been constituted following the district's 1979 bankruptcy). As part of the law, teachers were not allowed to strike for the first 18 months of the new administration, during which the union and the school board negotiated a new four-year contract. The law also gave the CEO authority to intervene in schools that were performing poorly.

The second condition was the broad pool of expertise that Vallas was able to draw on. Mayor Daley was willing to transfer top aides to assist Vallas. An analysis of 111 top administrative appointments made in the central office between July 1995 and February 1998 showed diversity of expertise. More than 40 percent of these appointees came from outside the school system—from the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and city agencies. In areas that were not directly related to education practices, such as finance and purchasing, more than 60 percent of the appointees came from outside the school system.

In the end, however, it was Paul Vallas who used these favorable conditions strategically to regain public, business, and media support for the Chicago schools. Of 114 editorials on education in the city's two major newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun Times*, between August 1995 and March 1997, three out of four endorsed the district leadership's complete exercise of power over school policy issues. Only 25 percent of the articles suggested a greater degree of shared governance. Furthermore, an analysis of about 1,000 news articles during this period found positive coverage of Vallas and his top managers. Vallas was perceived as being fair and responsive to public concerns about waste and inefficiency. The central administration, for example, set up its own Office of Investigations, under the guidance of a former newspaper reporter, to uncover administrative fraud.

Equally important was the positive response from the financial community. In response to labor peace and balanced budgets, Standard & Poor's raised the district's bond rating from BBB- to BBB in March 1996, then to A- in 1997. The favorable bond rating enabled the school board to raise billions of dollars to finance the first citywide capital improvement project in decades.

The building projects were one of the keys to Vallas's efforts to connect public school improvement to the city's overall "quality of life." Simply put, better schools mean a livable city. Even when families do not have children enrolled in the public schools, they cannot completely avoid the adverse effects of a failing school system that contributes to dependency and higher dropout rates. Lacking basic infrastructure, many schools would not be able to meet the needs of an increasingly high-tech learning environment. Vallas and the school board were able to raise $2.5 billion to renovate aging buildings, improve existing operating systems such as heating, expand schooling opportunities with science laboratories and playgrounds, and build new schools. The new schools were designed both to reduce classroom overcrowding in Latino neighborhoods and to provide magnet-like high-school facilities to attract the middle class. These building efforts managed to slow the migration of middle-school graduates to high schools outside of the Chicago public schools.

VALLAS addressed a key limitation of decentralization—namely, that it cannot compel academic improvement across a school system.

To attract more students and keep them in the Chicago schools, Vallas also supported the creation of charter schools and magnet programs designed to retain middle-

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A new breed of urban mayors, including Chicago's Richard M. Daley (right, seated next to his father, former Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley), have come to see the school system as one of the keys to rebuilding the cities.

class residents, such as International Baccalaureate programs at the high-school level. Although enjoying substantial autonomy from the central office, charter schools were required to enroll students with at-risk backgrounds, particularly at the middle- and high-school levels. For example, a conglomerate of alternative high schools for school dropouts was labeled a charter. Some charter schools provided stability in declining communities as they took over the vacated buildings of former Catholic schools. Other high-performing charters were seen as laboratories of educational practices as they competed with neighborhood schools.

Daley and Vallas also recognized the limitations of the school system in meeting the multiple and varied needs of families and children. As a result, they promoted collaboration across public agencies and nonpublic institutions. After all, as much as two-thirds of a child's waking hours are spent outside of school. With support from corporate funding, Vallas piloted the "Lighthouse" after-school programs in dozens of high-poverty schools. These programs provided inner-city children with recreational and tutorial support as well as a hot meal. With additional federal funds, Lighthouse programs were gradually expanded to more than 350 schools. Joint educational programs were created between the Chicago Public Schools and other institutions, such as museums, the Parks District, the Chicago Housing Authority, and city colleges. The partnership with the Parks District served more than 10,000 Chicago students in 1996 with an after-school program that gave kids an hour of homework help and two hours of recreation and cultural events at the parks before their parents picked them up after work.

Accountability

What Vallas and the Chicago reform program are most known for, however, is the pressure they placed on schools and students to meet district-wide standards of accountability. Vallas pursued a three-pronged strategy of accountability: 1) to hold students accountable for their academic performance, 2) to hold schools accountable for their performance, and 3) to restore the central office's ability to intervene in failing schools.

Consequences for students. In the spring of 1996, Chicago became the first urban district in the nation to declare an end to "social promotion." Students in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, and 9th grades could be held back if they failed to score at the district benchmark in math and reading on nationally normed tests—the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) or the Test of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) for 9th graders. The district generally set the benchmark at approximately one grade level below the national norm. Students whose scores were inadequate had to attend a Summer Bridge remediation program. The policy also required 3rd, 6th, and 8th graders to receive passing grades in reading and mathematics and to have no more than 20 unexcused absences.

The Summer Bridge program for low-scoring students was a central component of the district's promotion policy. The board provided Bridge teachers with scripted lesson plans that identified lesson objectives and materials, the order of activities, the presentation of the material, and the instructional format teachers should use. At the end of the seven-week program, students took the standardized test again. If they met or exceeded the district benchmark, they were promoted to the next grade. If they failed, they were retained. Eighth graders who were 15 or over were placed in district transition schools. Each year, on average, about one-third of the students in the benchmarking grades were required to enroll in the Summer Bridge Program. Following the seven-week program, two-thirds of them were able to advance to the next grade.

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In the end, slightly more than 10 percent of students in relevant grades were held back for another year. About 5 percent of students had to repeat the same grade for the third time. These students were subsequently given more individualized attention or placed in an alternative instructional setting. The promotion policy did not seem to produce higher dropout rates.

Consequences for schools. Vallas signaled his impatience with the lowest-performing schools early in his tenure. In January 1996 he placed 20 elementary and 8 high schools on remediation for failing to meet state standards for three consecutive years. Only six schools had been placed on remediation by the previous administration. Of these six schools, the board approved Vallas's recommendation to remove two elementary-school principals because they failed to improve after a year of remediation. The district's focus on the lowest-performing schools gained national attention in September 1996 when Vallas placed 109 schools (or 20 percent of all the schools in the system) on "academic probation." These schools had fewer than 15 percent of their students performing at the national norm on standardized tests. After two years, the district reported that about 20 percent of the schools (mostly elementary) had been taken off probation.

Low-performing high schools were more intransigent. Consequently, in May 1997, Vallas announced that seven high schools were being "reconstituted." These schools had fewer than 10 percent of their students scoring at or above national norms and had shown no improvement on test scores while on probation. Five of the seven principals were fired and about 30 percent of the teaching staff was replaced in the reconstituted schools. While their test scores improved slightly in the next three years, the seven schools were not able to meet the benchmarks necessary to be removed from probation by the end of Vallas's tenure.

Support for failing schools. The Vallas administration did not let failing schools "sink or swim." The district required each school on probation to work with a probation manager and an external partner. Probation managers, paid for by the central administration, were current or former principals from either Chicago public or Catholic schools. Their role was to oversee the development and implementation of the school improvement plan and to monitor the school improvement process. External partners were teams of support personnel from national reform groups, central office, and local universities who were chosen by schools from a board-approved list. The external partners bore the most responsibility for driving the school improvement process.

The Next Phase of Reform

Taken together, these strategies—management efficiency, using schools to improve the city's overall quality of life, and linking resources to raise student performance—guided much of the work of the Vallas administration. During Vallas's tenure, these strategies brought about a dramatic improvement in academic performance in Chicago (see Brian Jacob, "High Stakes in Chicago," page 66, for an investigation of test scores in Chicago during the Vallas era). In addition, the dropout rate remained steady between 1995 (15.5 percent) and 2000 (15.2 percent), while the number of high-school graduates increased from 14,818 to 16,195. And all this was accomplished without increasing the relative cost per teacher. The average salary for a teacher in Chicago was 27 percent higher than the state average in 1990. By 2000, Chicago teachers were earning 15 percent more than the state average. In other words, Chicago schools seemed to have become more cost-effective during the Vallas years.

Vallas's reform program has laid a solid foundation for his successor, Arne Duncan, to take school improvement to the next phase. To facilitate a better connection between elementary schools and the high schools they feed into, the Vallas administration started to focus on literacy skills at the early grades. Such a focus has become a top priority in Duncan's administration. Another long-term challenge is to raise the "instructional bar" for all teachers. Vallas never attempted to institute direct teacher accountability for student learning. This may have been a result of compromise between the Chicago Teachers Union and the mayor in exchange for labor peace amid a wide range of fairly ambitious reform initiatives.

Vallas's accomplishments far exceeded the expectations of the mayor, the public, and the business community. With the support of the mayor, Vallas restored public confidence in the school system and created political stability, conditions necessary for a functioning school district. He changed the management culture of the central administration with a performance-based vision, efficiency, openness, and fairness. He himself set an example of public service with high standards of professional integrity and commitment. In a highly politicized and racially polarized city, Vallas mobilized and united groups that committed to improving the public schools. In short, Vallas showed that leadership matters in government.

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The story behind the Philadelphia school district's unprecedented

THE PHILAD

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PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF EDISON SCHOOLS, INC.

feature

by JAY MATHEWS

move to turn 20 schools over to for-profit operator Edison Schools

ELPHIA EXPERIMENT

GWENCAROL HOLMES, A TALL, SLENDER KANSAN, suppressed a smile whenever angry Philadelphians attacked the track record of her company, Edison Schools. Edison, the New York–based for-profit school management firm, was seen by many in the nation's seventh-largest city as a greedy, slick huckster. Edison's opponents cited the company's failures, such as the two schools Edison had to give up in Holmes's hometown of Wichita.

If Edison failed in Wichita, the critics said, it had no chance in a metropolis like Philly. And so Holmes would have to explain again that she was the principal whose school, Colvin Elementary, had outperformed those two Edison schools in Wichita. But she had succeeded because she was using Edison's methods and because the competition from Edison enabled her to squeeze more resources out of the central office. She was so transformed by the experience that she joined the enemy.

The Wichita school board had resented the idea that it needed an outside company—from NuYawk, no less—to save its worst schools. To assuage its pride, it assigned one of its best principals—Holmes—to run a school that would use Edison methods and show everybody that the locals were just as good as any bunch of out-of-towners (contradictory as that may sound). The fact that Holmes, the symbol of local resistance, switched to preaching for a tested national approach gives hope to many educators who think private enterprises with track records have a place in the solution of the nation's worst education problems.

The stakes and the risks for Edison are, of course, far greater in Philadelphia than they were in Wichita. The company's $11.8 million contract to run 20 of the city's worst-performing schools is the largest challenge Edison has ever had in one metropolis. As such, it has the potential to become a referendum not just on Edison but also on privatization as a reform strategy. Moreover, Edison has been hobbled by both the terms of the Philadelphia contract and a run of financial and legal problems. The firm was

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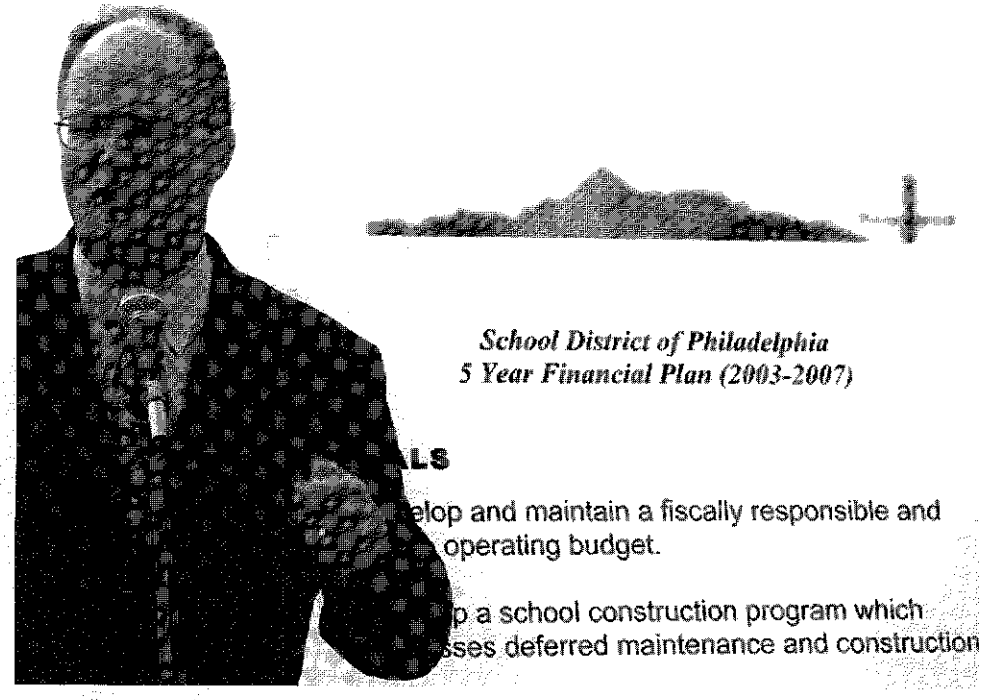
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Vallas's insistence on strict accountability fits the Edison model well, but one never knows what will happen when new leadership tries to make its imprint on a school district.

not assigned the 20 schools it was to manage until April 2002, four months before the new school year, giving it little time to install its program and train school personnel. By then the company's stock price had plummeted (see Figure 1) and it was unclear how much longer Edison could survive without turning a profit. It secured a new round of financing, but on terms highly unfavorable to the company.

The arrival of a new superintendent, former Chicago schools CEO Paul G. Vallas, has made the situation even cloudier. Vallas's insistence on strict accountability and regular testing of all schools fits the Edison model well, but one never knows what will happen when new leadership tries to make its imprint on a school district. Consider this then, whatever Edison's fate, to be a case study of an effort to bring a relatively new and data-based education product to a very old and tired city, an experiment that is taking place in one form or another in nearly every large school district in the country.

At Ridge's Invitation

More than 200,000 students attend the Philadelphia city schools, fewer than 20 percent of them non-Hispanic whites, 78 percent of them from families poor enough to qualify for federally subsidized school lunches. Just before Edison arrived in Philadelphia, the city government had tried to sue the state for more school funding. Mayor John F. Street eventually agreed to put aside the suit in return for negotiations between the city and the state, the state demanding reforms and the city in turn asking for more money to pay for them.

Street, an African-American lawyer who once taught at a city elementary school, is a veteran of Philadelphia's racially tinged politics. Mayor Frank Rizzo was a lightning rod for racial tension in the 1980s. To the present day, politics in Philadelphia still tends to focus on issues of black and white more than in other cities—cities like New York and Los Angeles, where the massive inflow of Latino and Asian immigrants has created a more diverse political scene. But Street was a practical man, willing to overlook old battles if he could persuade the state to help and to defuse the feeling among many African-Americans in Philadelphia that the white power structure in Harrisburg was underfunding and discriminating against their schools.

His negotiations on the funding issue were with Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge, a popular Republican who had beaten his Democratic opponent almost two to one in 1998. Ridge grew up in Erie and had been an infantryman in Vietnam. As governor, he proposed a voucher program for public school parents whose children were stuck in bad schools. His proposal won the support of some black Philadelphia legislators, but he could not overcome the resistance of the mainly Republican suburbs. Ridge did manage to persuade Street to sign a memorandum of understanding in July 2001 that gave him permission to order an analysis of the financial and educational condition of the school district. The state resisted giving the schools more funds when many observers thought the district was grossly mismanaging its finances and operations. It wanted some kind of assurance, backed by independent research, that any new money would be spent more effectively. Enter Edison Schools.

Rising Scores . . .

Ridge and his aides were impressed with Edison's track record. Created in 1992 and starting its school management program in 1996, Edison had contracts to run more than 100 public schools. It was the brainchild of entrepreneur Christopher Whittle, whose controversial Channel One program had placed specially produced television news shows and advertising in public school homerooms.

Edison had gone further than any other private firm in demonstrating what business could do for the nation's most impoverished children. Most of its schools were charter or contract schools, run independent of school district supervision but using tax dollars. Edison was educating some 85,000 students scattered across 23 states and the District of Columbia, making it the equivalent of the 45th-largest school district in the country (see Figure 1). Edison executives promised to

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save money and spread technological innovation by running those schools from a central administrative point. Many parents gravitated toward Edison as a fresh alternative to traditionally low-budget, low-tech inner-city schools. Schools like the Edison Friendship Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., had waiting lists from the moment they opened.

Just how successful Edison has been in raising student achievement remains a matter of debate (see Figure 2). John Chubb, Edison's chief education officer, says that "student achievement is rising faster—much faster—in Edison schools than in any other similar system of schools in America." Though critics dispute these numbers, there is little doubt that Edison has taken on significant challenges.

Edison's portfolio is almost entirely made up of schools in distressed neighborhoods, areas with a demographic profile similar to that of the city of Philadelphia. About 70 percent of Edison students are poor enough to qualify for federal lunch subsidies, and more than 80 percent are black or Hispanic.

Edison officials say their schools are doing better because of innovative systems for hiring principals, checking student progress monthly, and teaching reading to older children. Edison schools use the Success For All system, which places students in small, well-paced, frequently tested groups for teaching reading. It gives home computers to students in the 3rd grade and up. It has longer school days and school years than ordinary public schools. Thomas Toch, a writer at the Washington-based National Center on Education and the Economy, praised innovations such as computer cameras for preliminary principal-hiring interviews and frequent dismissals of underperforming managers.

The state resisted giving the Philadelphia schools more funds when many observers thought the district was grossly mismanaged.

academic crisis in the Philadelphia schools.

The local union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), repeated its long opposition to a state takeover and to any private companies running schools. There was also resistance from some students. Eric Braxton, the 26-year-old director of the Philadelphia Student Union, an organization of 4,000 politically active high-school students, began to organize marches and sit-ins. "Edison had a huge debt and they were trying to alleviate their difficulties by opening more schools," he said. "We saw an inherent conflict of interest."

Lois Yampolsky led parental opposition in northeast Philadelphia. Her neighbors were mostly white, middle-class Catholics and Jews, but she embraced the anti-Edison views of some African-American leaders in poorer parts of the city. "From the moment I read about Edison and its history," she said,

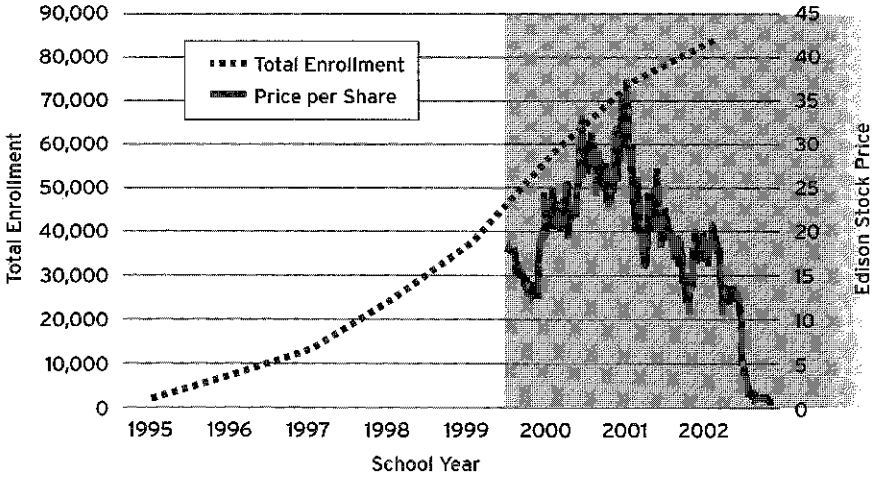
. . . But No Profits

If educational performance were the only yardstick, Edison would probably rank among the best urban school districts. But it has to please more than just parents and policymakers. Edison has to turn a profit, and its continuing failure to do so had pushed its stock price well below $1 a share by the end of August 2002 (see Figure 1).

Moreover, the teacher unions, whose members work in schools Edison is trying to manage, tend to bristle at the suggestion that a private company might make a profit on their turf, further complicating the company's progress and provoking fervent protests in some cities. The demonstrations in Philadelphia began when Ridge announced in the summer of 2001 that he was awarding Edison a $2.7 million contract to study and make proposals for dealing with the financial and

Rising Demand, Falling Price (Figure 1)

As Edison Schools' student enrollment skyrocketed, its continuing failure to turn a profit sent its stock price plummeting below $1 a share. The company opened its first school in 1995 and went public in November 1999.



SOURCES: Edison Schools; cnn.com

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF EDISON SCHOOLS, INC.

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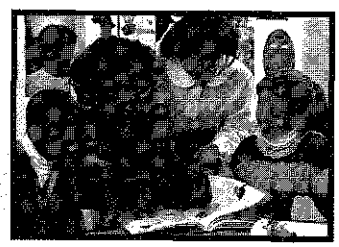
"I was determined to keep them out of the Philadelphia schools." Edison officials said Yampolsky resisted their peace offerings. Adam Tucker, an Edison executive working on community relations, said she refused an invitation to visit an Edison school. "She said, 'I am not going to a dog and pony show,'" Tucker said.

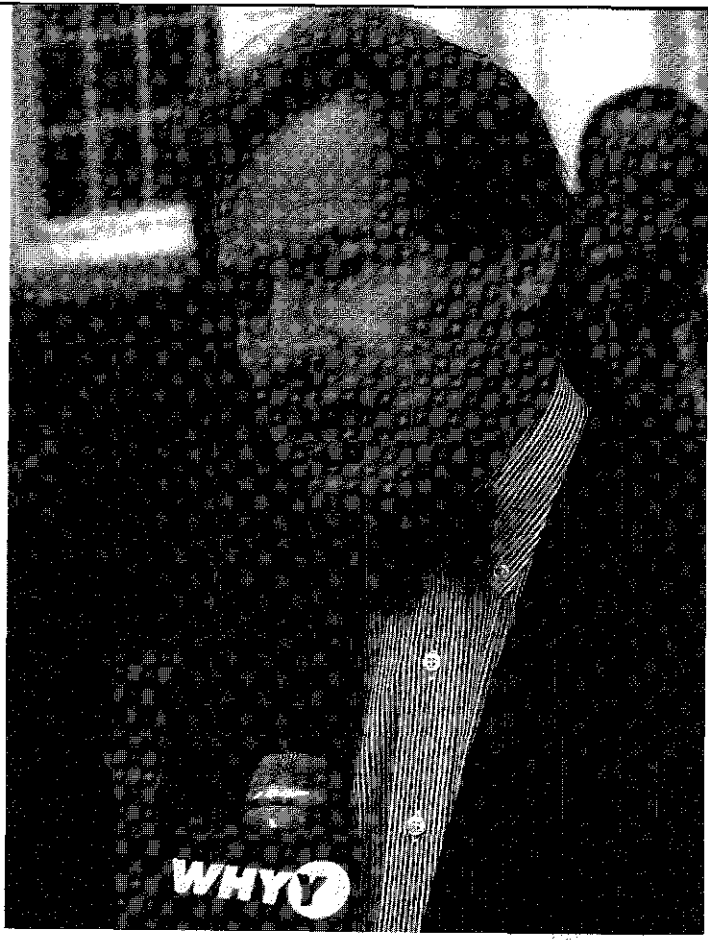
As expected, the report Edison submitted to the state was a long list of Philadelphia's failings. Fifty percent of Philadelphia students dropped out before graduating from high school. In the past decade, the report said, the Philadelphia schools had spent more than $10 billion "with no clear accountability for the results." The school district "finds itself overwhelmed with considerable, institutionalized issues across many critical functions, including a dizzying array of curricula with little centralized district control over them ... and a poor and uncoordinated [information technology] system that leaves the District powerless to understand and use both student and educator performance data."

The report was loudly denounced by Edison's critics. "They pointed out everything they thought was being done poorly ... and said they were the solution," said U.S. representative Chaka Fattah, a former state legislator.

But Ridge, who praised the report, had unique leverage over the future of the Philadelphia schools. Under a law passed in 1998, the state could take over the city's education system if it experienced any of a long list of financial problems, including a severe deficit. In the summer of 2001, Philadelphia schools were $215 million in the red, the result of long years of underfunding, according to city officials, or long years of mismanagement, according to their critics. The city had made up the difference with expense cuts and one-time revenue infusions. This left the city vulnerable to a determined move in Harrisburg, where the Republicans controlled the legislature.



The teacher unions, whose members work in schools that Edison is a candidate to manage, tend to bristle at the suggestion that a private company might make a profit on their turf.



The report Edison submitted to the state was a long list of Philadelphia's failings. Fifty percent of Philadelphia students dropped out before graduating from high school. Here, Edison CEO Chris Whittle talks to reporters.

Ridge was called to Washington to become President Bush's homeland security advisor, but a plan for a state takeover of the city schools was already under way. Debra Kahn, Philadelphia's secretary of education, said Street had three choices: 1) continue to go from crisis to crisis, 2) endure a hostile state takeover, or 3) form a partnership with the state to change the way the schools were run. Ridge was replaced by the lieutenant governor, Mark Schweiker, in October 2001. In December, Schweiker and Street agreed to the creation of the five-member School Reform Commission, which would replace the city school board. Three members would be appointed by Schweiker, two by Street.

Commissioning Edison

Schweiker, a wealthy management consultant, was, from the very beginning of his governorship, a lame duck. He announced that he would not run in 2002 for a full term, a move that Edison's opponents saw would make him less effective in fighting for Ridge's plan.

Nonetheless, the new School Reform Commission had the authority to hire independent contractors to run the school system's headquarters as well as individual schools. State officials had suggested that Edison might run the central office, but city groups—particularly the teacher union—were intensely opposed. For Edison to take over a system based on its own recommendation "was a clear conflict of interest," said Barbara

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Goodman, a spokesperson for the PFT. Street said he thought the state was underestimating the challenge and overestimating Edison's abilities. He set up an office at school headquarters and said he would not leave until the idea of Edison's running the building was discarded. Schweiker bowed to the pressure, withdrawing the original proposal in exchange for Street's agreement to let Edison be a consultant and run several schools.

With the political campaign against Edison in high gear, the School Reform Commission announced a compromise. Edison would get only half the number of schools it asked for, but more than any other private group. The commission identified 70 schools in need of special help, of which Edison would manage 20. Another 25 were assigned to two other for-profit companies and two universities. Twenty-one schools were to be restructured under the direction of a district team—an attempt to show what locals could do, just as Holmes did in Wichita—while four other schools were to be turned into charter schools.

Turning 20 schools over to Edison was a victory for advocates of school privatization. But it was a failure in the eyes of Wall Street, where the expectation was that Edison would receive 40 schools. Edison also suffered a series of blows to its financial image. The company accepted a Securities and Exchange Commission finding that it had improperly reported its receipt of money for teachers' salaries and other expenses as revenue in 4 out of 62 contracts. In June, however, Edison announced that two financial institutions, Chelsey Capital and Merrill Lynch, had agreed to loan the company $40 million. (In August Edison said the deal had been revised, with Chelsey Capital being replaced as a lender by a new company, School Services Inc.)

Community Relations

For local educators and parents, the events leading up to Edison's arrival were traumatic. Truddie Kellam, who had both a child and a grandchild at Kenderton Elementary, said she had not liked the state takeover of the city schools. "I felt like we didn't count," she said. Kelley Elementary principal Mike Garafola had reacted viscerally to his school's being placed on the list of 70 elementary and middle schools in need of special help. "It was like being kicked in the stomach," he said. The school's 400 children, 94 percent of them poor enough to qualify for federal lunch subsidies, scored far below national averages, but they had shown some improvement and Garafola resented the school's getting no credit for that.

At a community meeting organized by Edison, Kellam asked many questions. She read the pamphlets, but they were too vague for her. She kept pushing and found herself appointed by Edison to the panel interviewing candidates for principal of the school. Like other parents, she had concerns about a private company taking over, but that was nothing compared with her frustration at the many failures of the past. "The problem is the children and their education," she said. "Money has been spent and they still are not getting it." So, she said, she was willing to give Edison a chance.

Among the Edison executives leading the community meetings were Holmes, from Wichita, and Ken Cherry, just arrived from Maryland. In Baltimore, Cherry had been a public school teacher and then an Edison academy director, partly responsible for one of the company's most celebrated recent successes. The Maryland state school board had taken over three of Baltimore's lowest-scoring elementary schools, Templeton, Gilmor, and Montebello, and given them to Edison. In April, just after the Philadelphia commission announced it was giving 20 schools to Edison, the *Baltimore Sun* reported big improvements in the Edison schools in Baltimore.

To make the same thing happen in Philadelphia, Edison officials said, they had to have the right principals. The company called an evening meeting at its temporary headquarters at the Buttonwood Hotel for the principals of the 20 schools it had been assigned. Garafola, who had been principal of Kel-

Achievement Gains (Figure 2)

Edison Schools has reported substantial gains in student achievement, pointing to positive achievement trends in 84 percent of the schools for which long-term data were available.

Edison Schools Average Annual Achievement

Type of Test Scoring	Number of Schools	Average Annual Gain Since Schools Opened, 1995–2001	Average Gain in 2000–'01
Criterion-referenced tests[1]	47	6% (gain in % proficient)	7% (same)
		6% (gain in % not failing)	9% (same)
Norm-referenced tests[2]	27	5 percentile points	5 percentile points

[1] Criterion-referenced scoring is used in most state-required tests.

[2] Norm-referenced scoring is used on the Terra Nova, SAT9, MAT7, and ITBS tests

NOTE: The group Parents Advocating School Responsibility has faulted Edison for including only 74 schools in the study at a time when it was operating 113 schools. Edison explains that test-score gain data (which require information both before and after attendance at an Edison school) were available for only 74 schools. (Most of the schools not included had only recently opened their doors.) An article in the *New York Times* said Edison's use of school-wide averages masked declines in specific grades. Edison replied that only 2 out of the 62 schools with positive ratings showed such declines.

SOURCE: *Edison Schools*

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"From the moment I read about Edison and its history," said one parental opponent, "I was determined to keep them out of the Philadelphia schools."

ley Elementary since 1993, said the body language at the long table was unmistakable. "I could have written down how many would stay at Edison and how many would not," he said. Some crossed their arms. Some turned their backs. But Garafola and others liked what they heard.

Several principals said they liked the fact that Edison promised to weave character education into every class. Holmes had seen how that had worked in Wichita. "A lot of the children we are working with are coming out of a culture of poverty that is very different from the culture of the middle-class world and the working world," she said. "A lot of times teachers who come out of the middle-class world expect behaviors out of children that the children don't even know they are expected to do because they haven't been taught. So you just explain to them, hey, let me tell you ... what you will do when you become an adult and go to the adult world." By July, Edison knew that 8 of the 20 principals had agreed to stay at their schools, including Garafola.

Several principals said they liked the fact that Edison promised to weave character education into every class.

New Leadership

In July 2002 the commission named Vallas, a finance expert widely praised for his work as chief executive officer of the Chicago schools, as CEO of the Philadelphia schools. He squashed what remained of a proposal to have Edison also serve as a consultant to district headquarters for an additional $18 million to $24 million. "We don't need a lead education consultant," said Vallas, who signed a $225,000-a-year contract. "That's what I'm here for." Nonetheless, he promised to make sure the delicate arrangements between city and state would go forward, with Edison running more schools in Philadelphia than any other independent group.

The story of Edison in Philadelphia, however it works out, is likely to demonstrate two truths about improving schools. First, factors that have little to do with children are often very important. The strength of the PFT and its resistance to change, the desire to find a political compromise that would give all combatants some sense of victory, the vestiges of old battles over money and race, and Edison's precarious financial status all had great influence over the number of schools Edison received and the initial support it had from teachers and parents.

Second, improvement in achievement is not going to be big or fast. Edison can point to overall gains and to recent increases in scores in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Its critics can point to drops in Edison scores in some grades in a few cities. But few programs have succeeded in sustaining significant annual improvement in a significant number of schools for several years in a row. The most impressive rises in student achievement have occurred in isolated cases in a few schools—for instance, the Advanced Placement program at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles or the KIPP middle schools in Houston and the Bronx.

Holmes expects more though. "I came to work for Edison because I believe in their design and saw what a unique opportunity they had in Philadelphia," Holmes said. "If they can prove that 20 schools can be reformed en masse, then why not an entire district?" When she first went to Colvin, the school in Wichita that bested Edison with Edison's methods, "I would never have allowed my children to attend there," she said. "Now many of the staff bring their children to Colvin. When the Philly schools are good enough for my children, we will have succeeded."

–Jay Mathews covers education for The Washington Post.

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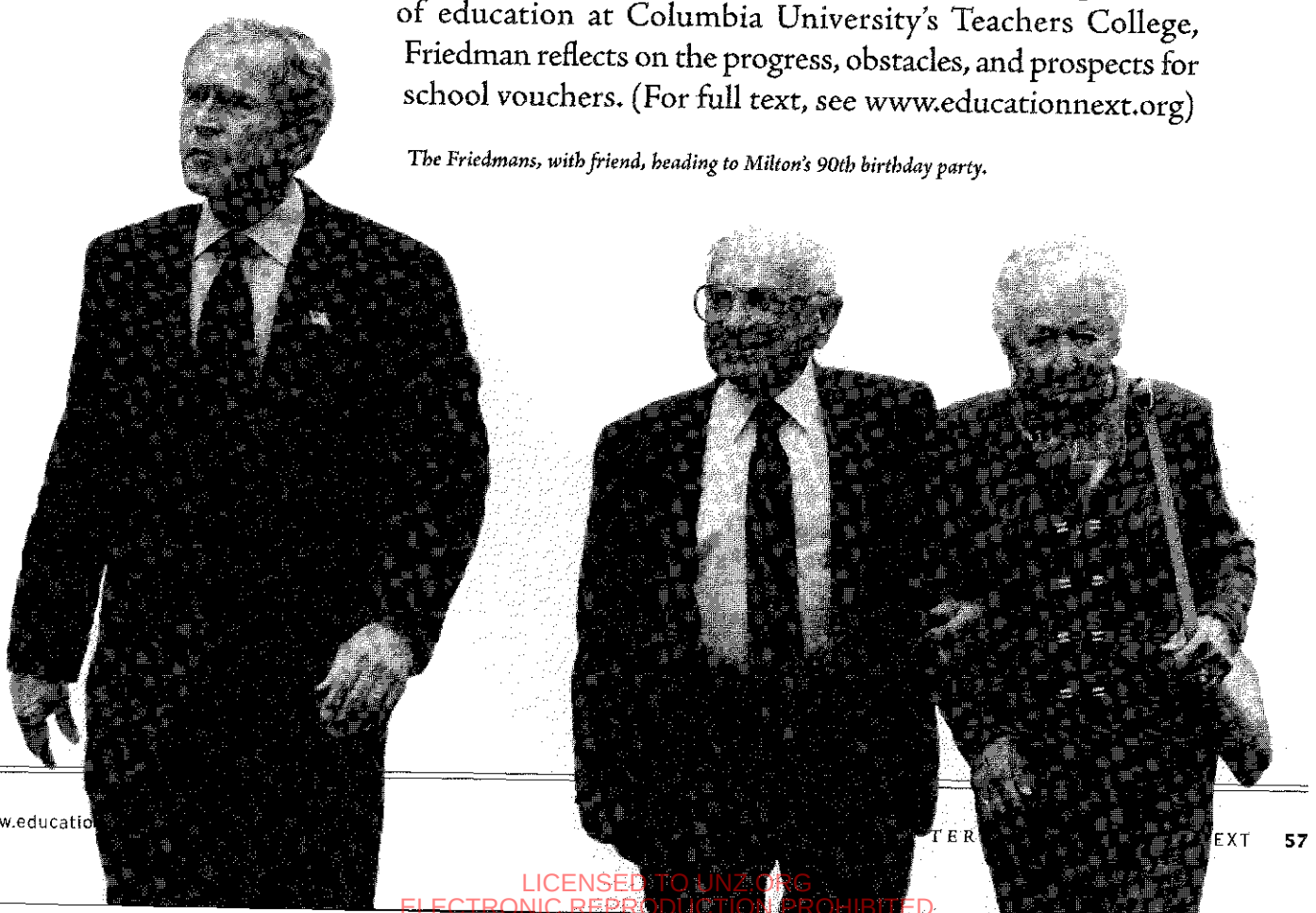
Choice & Freedom

Legendary economist Milton Friedman reflects on the idea he spawned half a century ago INTERVIEWED by PEARL ROCK KANE

NOBEL LAUREATE ECONOMIST MILTON FRIEDMAN WAS AMONG THE FIRST (John Stuart Mill made a similar proposal 100 years earlier) to propose that the financing of education be separated from the administration of schools, the core idea behind school vouchers. In a famous 1955 essay, Friedman argued that there is no need for government to run schools. Instead, families could be provided with publicly financed vouchers for use at the K–12 educational institutions of their choice. Such a system, Friedman believed, would promote competition among schools vying to attract students, thus improving quality, driving down costs, and creating a more dynamic education system.

Now 90, Friedman and his wife, Rose, continue to promote the voucher idea, primarily through the Indianapolis-based Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation. Here, in an interview with Pearl Rock Kane, an associate professor of education at Columbia University's Teachers College, Friedman reflects on the progress, obstacles, and prospects for school vouchers. (For full text, see www.educationnext.org)

The Friedmans, with friend, heading to Milton's 90th birthday party.



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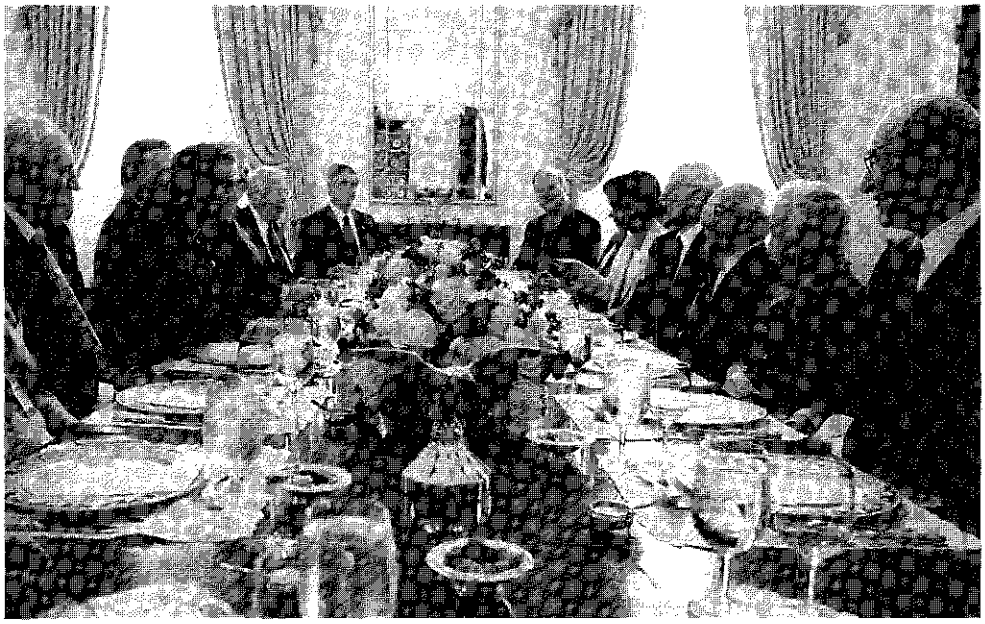
PRK: We've had experiments with vouchers in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Florida, and we have some experience with privately funded vouchers. We also have a proliferation of charter schools. How do you feel about the proposal you made almost 50 years ago?

FRIEDMAN: What you say sounds as if a lot has been accomplished, but it's only the beginning. So far, we've had very limited programs. The Milwaukee program is the largest, and it only allows up to 15,500 students.

A more interesting thing was the Children's Scholarship Fund program, in which 1.25 million families applied for 40,000 scholarships, each of which requires that recipients spend at least $1,000 out of their own pocket. That shows that there's an enormous demand for choice, an enormous market waiting for choice to develop.



"There will be a brand new industry," says Milton Friedman, "a private, for-profit, and nonprofit education industry. It will introduce competition in a way that's never existed before."

PRK: In your vision of schooling, will education be provided exclusively by the for-profit sector?

FRIEDMAN: No, I see competition. Let parents choose. I would expect an open market where there would be a wide variety of schools. There would be for-profit schools, charter schools, parochial schools, and government schools. Which survived would depend on which ones satisfied their customers. If experience is any guide, I'd expect that the government sector would shrink rapidly over time, just as has happened in mail delivery. Federal Express and UPS have taken away a large part of the business that used to be monopolized by the post office.

Moreover, there's no reason to expect that the future market will have the shape or form that our present market has. How do we know how education will develop? Why is it sensible for a child to get all his or her schooling in one brick building? Why not add partial vouchers? Why not let them spend part of a voucher for math in one place and English or science somewhere else? Why should schooling have to be in one building? Why can't a student take some lessons at home, especially now, with the availability of the Internet? Right now, as a matter of fact, one of the biggest growth areas has been home schooling. There are more children being home schooled than there are in all of the voucher programs combined.

PRK: Yes, recent estimates are just under one million.

FRIEDMAN: In a way that's evidence of the failure of our current education system. There is no other complex field in our society in which do-it-yourself beats out factory production or market production. Nobody makes his or her own car. But it still is the case that parents can perform the job of educating their children, in many cases better than our present education system. I don't know what other programs would emerge. Neither you nor I is imaginative enough to dream of what real competition, a real free market, could produce, what kind of innovations would emerge.

PRK: Have you any concern that the families with more financial and social capital might choose the best schools for their children, and other families' children would have to attend inferior schools?

FRIEDMAN: If that were the case, there would be more "best" schools produced. Throughout history, hasn't the relationship been just the other way around? When automobiles first came out, they were very expensive. Only the rich could afford them. What happens over time, the well-to-do provide, as it were, the experimental funds to develop an industry. Automobiles are developed. The well-to-do buy them, and that provides the basis for a small industry. The industry grows, it develops better techniques, it becomes cheaper, and now almost everybody has an automobile. Surely, there's much less difference in the stratification of people buying automobiles now than there was, let's say, a hundred years ago, when the automobile industry was just getting started. Again, televisions were developed in the 1930s. They were very expensive; only the rich bought them. But now everybody has a television. And in general, over history, every improvement has benefited mostly low-income people.

PRK: What about the families that wouldn't apply for the private voucher or the families that never learned about the opportunity?

FRIEDMAN: They would not be as well off, as they're not as well off in other ways, either. Let me ask you a question.

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The low-income families in the worst inner cities, in Watts or in Harlem: Are these as badly off with respect to food as they are with schools? Can you name any other aspect of their lives in which they are as badly off as they are with schools?

Even in housing, they can have a choice. They can try to find better housing for themselves; they can go outside their immediate neighborhood. But with respect to schooling, they're stuck. Even those who are willing to hand over $1,000 for their child to go to a better school, they can't do it.

The major effect of vouchers would be to reduce discrepancies between the quality of schooling that the children in the inner city are getting and the quality of schooling of the most high-income person. Currently, that discrepancy couldn't get any wider. It can only get narrower. You're not taking away any alternative; you're providing additional options for families.

PRK: Do you feel that the teacher unions are the power we have to contend with in trying to improve schools?

FRIEDMAN: That certainly is true, but they're not the only problem. It's the unions, plus the bureaucracy, the administrative apparatus, the state officials, and the like. Those are the ones we do have to contend with. The two unions, the NEA and the AFT, are without question the most politically potent trade unions in the United States. The unions have been able to get all sorts of advantages from state law. In the state of California and most other states, they have an automatic check-off, where the dues are taken out of paychecks by the state. They have provisions whereby the teachers can go on union duty and continue to receive their pay. They can become an employee of the union and continue to accumulate retirement funds.

PRK: How likely is it that union power will be diminished?

FRIEDMAN: I think it's very likely because I think the situation has gotten so serious, and parents have gotten so concerned about it, that the dam is beginning to break. It's fascinating that the issue of vouchers should have been an issue for the Democrats, not the Republicans. It's an issue whose main beneficiaries are poor people. In every poll, the groups that are the most strongly in favor of vouchers are the low-income categories, particularly blacks. Blacks are a good case study for vouchers. You have 60 percent, 70 percent, and 80 percent of blacks expressing a desire for vouchers. Yet there have been almost no black leaders who have ever come out for vouchers, with two exceptions in recent years—Polly Williams in Milwaukee, who was a major driving force behind the voucher program in Milwaukee, and Floyd Flake in New York, a Democratic congressman who was strongly pro voucher. Yet blacks are the natural constituency for vouchers. Why have black leaders been opposed to vouchers? Because of the teacher unions. When Bill Clinton was governor of Arkansas, he was in favor of a choice among private schools as well as public schools. He went to Washington, and he made a private school choice for himself. He sent Chelsea to a nice private school, but he changed his position on choice completely. He continued to favor choice among public schools, but he was opposed to choice among private schools. Why? Because of the trade union.

PRK: Many graduate students who care deeply about education will be reading the transcript of this interview. They are people who want to make a difference as educators. What advice would you give young people who want to make a difference? Where can they have an impact?

FRIEDMAN: I think that the best choice talented young people can make is to teach. Those who have an entrepreneurial streak can set up private schools, which will be able to attract voucher students. If I'm right, the voucher movement is going to expand and grow. There will be a brand new industry: the education industry, a private, for-profit, and nonprofit education industry. It will introduce competition in a way that's never existed before. And it's a big industry. Total expenditures of elementary and secondary education in the United States are in the neighborhood of $300 billion. That's as much as the worldwide industry of computer chips.

There will be many opportunities with vouchers, and teachers will get a great deal more satisfaction out of teaching in a school that is serving their customers than in serving the bureaucrats who run our government schools now. It's an interesting phenomenon that today teachers in private schools are paid less than teachers in government schools, but express greater satisfaction with their jobs. Maybe one of the things they should do is try to develop different kinds of education schools.

PRK: Do you want to elaborate on that?

FRIEDMAN: You know better than I do the defects of the schools of education in the United States. The schools of education have not been a great success. There's so much emphasis on teaching technique and so little on subject matter that, as you know, a great many of the teachers in government schools teach subject matter in which they have no competence. They're teaching mathematics when they have not been trained in mathematics. One of the benefits of a private system is that you wouldn't have all these rules about who can get licensed. Today in California, Edward Teller cannot teach physics in a high school, in a government high school. He did, as a matter of fact, out of his own interest, teach physics in a private high school, at a Hebrew academy, in the city of San Francisco. But he wouldn't be allowed to teach in a public school. ■

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Fanatical Secularism

Many educators see themselves as called to emancipate their students—a mission that can leave students imprisoned intellectually

by CHARLES L. GLENN

THE SUPREME COURT'S MAJORITY opinion in the Cleveland voucher case, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, was of course the most newsworthy aspect of the decision, but the dissents were no less revealing. In about 500 words, Justice Stevens managed to use the word "indoctrination" four times and "religious strife" twice. Likewise, Justice Breyer's dissent begins and ends with warnings of "religiously based social conflict" resulting from allowing parents to use public funding to send their children to sectarian schools. Today it is a little startling to encounter these echoes of Justice Black's 1968 dissent in *Board of Education v. Allen*, in which he warned:

> *The same powerful sectarian religious propagandists who have succeeded in securing passage of the present law to help religious schools carry on their sectarian religious purposes can and doubtless will continue their propaganda, looking toward complete domination and supremacy of their particular brand of religion. . . . The First Amendment's prohibition against governmental establishment of religion was written on the assumption that state aid to religion and religious schools generates discord, disharmony, hatred, and strife among our people, and that any government that supplies such aids is to that extent a tyranny. . . . The Court's affirmance here bodes nothing but evil to religious peace in this country.*

ILLUSTRATION BY POL TURGEON

Although the Supreme Court's decision in *Allen* has left no detectable sign of "disharmony, hatred, and strife among our people," the dissenting justices

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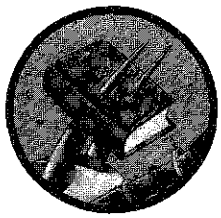
Parents have a fundamental right to choose the schooling that will shape their children's understanding of the world.



in the Cleveland case seem to believe that the only way to avoid "indoctrination" and religious warfare is to educate children in government-run schools (even though most industrialized countries provide support to religious schools. See accompanying table, page 64). Concerns over deep entanglements between government and religion have of course haunted the nation from its very beginning. But in the education realm, the sheer hostility toward religious schools is not just a matter of separating church from state. It in part reflects and derives from the self-image of many educators, who like to think of themselves as having been specially anointed to decide what is in the best interest of children. Faith-based schools, they assume, are in the business of "indoctrinating" their pupils, while public schools are by definition committed to critical thinking and to the emancipation of their pupils' minds from the darkness of received opinions, even those of their own parents.

What I have elsewhere called "the myth of the common school" is a deeply held view with tremendous political resonance, first articulated in the 1830s by Horace Mann and his allies. This myth insists that enlightenment is the exclusive province of public schools, which are thus the crucible of American life and character in a way that schools independent of government could never be.

The actual working out of this powerful idea in the 19th and early 20th centuries was not altogether benign. It included, for example, systematically denying that there were a number of ways to be a good American. Nor was the common school ideal ever fully realized, even in its New England home. Segregation by social class persisted, and black pupils were unofficially segregated in much of the North and West and officially segregated in all of the South. Even the famed "steamer classes" that served immigrant children in the cities of the East and Midwest often did not keep them in school beyond the first year or two.

Nonetheless, the myth of the "common school" deserves credit for many of the accomplishments of public education in this country. It articulated a coherent vision of the American character and of an America-in-process, and it made both convincingly attractive. In recent decades, however, this hopeful myth has been transmuted into an establishment ideology that borrows much of the language and the positive associations of the common school to serve a bureaucratized, monopolistic system that is increasingly unresponsive to what parents want for their children.

The Enlightenment Mission

In *The Myth of the Common School* (1988), a historical account of how the ideology of state schooling emerged, I traced the myth's development in 19th century France, the Netherlands, and the United States. To a great extent the myth was informed by a bias against orthodox religion, often in the name of what was considered a "higher and purer" form of Christianity stripped of "superstitious" elements such as an emphasis on sin and salvation, in favor of a purified morality and faith in progress. State-sponsored schooling was intended to replace religious particularism (whether Catholic or Calvinist) as well as local loyalties and norms with an emerging national identity and culture.

Enlightenment in this form was experienced by many as oppressive rather than liberating. In place of the convictions that had given meaning and direction, and often color and excitement, to their lives, people were offered a diffuse array of platitudes, a bloodless "secular faith" without power to shape moral obligation or to give direction to a life. The effect was to set people free for a new and more oppressive bondage, unrestrained by the custom and ceremony from which, as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats reminded us, innocence and beauty come to enrich our lives.

This political account of the development of public education continues to be helpful in understanding present-day conflicts in Western democracies. If we recognize that the attempt to achieve a government monopoly on schooling was intended to serve political purposes during a period of nation-building, we can see that this monopoly is no longer appropriate—if it ever was.

The case for charter schools, vouchers, and other forms of "marketized" education rests not only on educational performance but also on the claims of freedom of conscience. Parents have a fundamental right—written into the various international covenants protecting human rights—to choose the schooling that will shape their children's understanding of the world. But a right isn't really a right if it can't be exercised. Families who can't afford tuition at a private school or a move to the suburbs should still be able to make choices regarding their children's education.

There is, in other words, a strong argument against attempts by government to use schooling to achieve political or cultural change—or stability, for that matter. John Stuart Mill gave this argument definitive form in 1859, writing:

> *All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the*

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government . . . in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.

The same point was made in a lapidary phrase by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1925 *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* decision: "the child is not the mere creature of the State."

But does this leave nothing to be said for the role of schools in fostering the qualities of civic virtue on which, all moralists agree, the meaningful exercise of freedom depends? Put another way, does a commitment to limiting government's role in the education realm also require that schools refrain from seeking to form the character and worldview of their pupils? This is one of the central dilemmas of a republican form of government, at least in its contemporary form of limited state power. While republics pledge to respect the freedom of their citizens, they also depend on the voluntary adherence of those citizens to often complex norms of civic life. As a result, as Montesquieu pointed out, "It is in republican government that the full power of education is needed." The citizens of a republic must be virtuous since they govern themselves.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote that the teacher must choose whether he will make a man or a citizen. The choice is not so stark, but it is nevertheless real. The state may seek to mold citizens on a particular pattern, but citizens in a free society surely have a right not to be molded, in their opinions and character, by the state. The child is not the mere creature of the state.

Emancipating the Mind

Any account of the tensions between the educational goals of government and of families must consider the third side of the triangle: how teachers and other educators have understood their mission. It is easy to assume that public school teachers line up on the side of the "state project" in education, while teachers in faith-based and other nonstate schools line up on the side of parents. But the reality is much more complex. Indeed, the simple state-versus-parents dichotomy fails to do justice to many educators' perception of themselves as emancipators of the minds of their students.

As noted, education theorists have long contrasted the emancipatory role of the public school with the "indoctrination" they attribute to religious schools. This strikes a note with tremendous cultural resonance. "Emancipation," Jacques Barzun tells us, is "the modern theme par excellence." The most influential of contemporary educators like to think of themselves as liberators of the minds of their pupils rather than as conveyors of "dead" information, such as the traditions of Western culture.

As a result, those who set the pace in the world of American education, and those who follow their lead, look down on the teachers, parents, and policymakers who do not share this understanding of the teacher's mission. Leadership for American education has increasingly been provided by big-city and state superintendents, professors of education, and officials of the education associations and teacher unions who see little need to respond to the uninformed views of the general public and of parents. This was illustrated by a 1997 Public Agenda survey of "teachers of teachers," professors in teacher-training institutions. Of the 900 professors surveyed, 79 percent agreed that "the general public has outmoded and mistaken beliefs about what good teaching means." They considered communication with parents important, but not in order to learn what education parents wanted for their children. Parents were to be "educated or reeducated about how learning ought to happen in today's classroom."

The professors of education surveyed were convinced, for example, that "the intellectual process of searching and struggling to learn is far more important . . . than whether or not students ultimately master a particular set of facts." Sixty percent of them called for less memorization in classrooms, with one professor in Boston insisting that it was "politically dangerous . . . when students have to memorize and spout back." By contrast, according to another Public Agenda study, 86 percent of the public and 73 percent of teachers want students to memorize the multiplication tables and to learn to do math by hand before using calculators.

These are not purely technical questions; they reflect assumptions about the very nature of education. The professors are expressing one form of the "cosmopolitan" values that have been promoted by American schooling over the past century. This perspective has made the exclusion of religion from the public schools seem not a matter of political convenience or respect for societal diversity, but essential to the mission of education. It is also a sign of intellectual laziness. Teaching facts requires knowledge, which is acquired through rigorous study and research. All it takes to teach values is the ability to spout your own beliefs and prejudices.

Platonic Education

The marks of this condescension can be found in the various controversies that swirl around public schooling. State-imposed curriculum frameworks and standardized tests are condemned as distractions from the teaching of "critical thinking." Lecturing is rejected as an unsound practice because it wrongly assumes that the teacher holds some authority. Nor should the teacher stress right and wrong solutions to the problems that she poses; what is important is the pupil's engagement with the search for an answer. This self-censorship on the part of teachers is even more important when it comes to sex education, where talk of "character" and "virtue" is deeply suspect.

So much is this set of attitudes—the priority of "liberation" or "emancipation" as the central metaphor for the teacher's work—taken for granted among American educators that the

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Educational Mission

The Supreme Court's decision in the Cleveland school voucher case brings the United States one step closer to matching the actions of most major, industrial countries, which at least pay teacher salaries at private (including religious) schools.

Countries that provide at least teacher salaries for private schools:

Australia
Austria
Bangladesh
Belgium
Burkina Faso
Canada
Chile
Costa Rica
Denmark
England and Wales
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Honduras
Hungary
Ireland
Italy
Netherlands
Nicaragua
Norway
New Zealand
Northern Ireland
Pakistan
Poland
Portugal
Russia
Scotland
Slovenia
South Korea
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sweden
Thailand

Countries that provide partial support:

Czech Republic
Dominican Republic
Guatemala
Iceland
Iran
Jamaica
Japan
Lebanon
Lithuania
Malaysia
Morocco
Paraguay
Peru
Romania
Rwanda
Senegal
Saudi Arabia
South Africa
Switzerland
UNITED STATES
Uruguay
Venezuela

Countries that do not allow private schools:

Cuba
Vietnam

SOURCE: *Organisation internationale pour le droit à l'éducation et la liberté d'enseignement* (OIDEL), 2002

higher performance of pupils in other countries on international tests in math and science is often dismissed as reflecting other countries' inappropriate stress on drill and memorization. The possibility that a stress on rich curriculum content can result in lively, engaged classrooms is seldom credited. American pupils may not know as much, we are told, but they know how to think and to solve problems creatively.

This complacent assumption rests on a fundamental misunderstanding. Mental "emancipation" can be a very good thing, of course, when it removes the chains of misinformation and when it arouses a thirst for the truth that can be satisfied only by hard, honest mental effort. This is the traditional justification for a "liberal" education.

The classic description of such an emancipation is Plato's parable of prisoners in an underground cavern, convinced that the shadows on the wall are the only reality. One of the prisoners, in a process that Plato explicitly calls an analogy for education, is freed from his chains and brought to a state, literally, of enlightenment.

Plato makes it clear, though, that it is not enough to loose the chains; the prisoner must be forced to turn toward the light and compelled to venture out of the cavern. Only gradually can he bear the light of day, and only after much experience can he look directly at the source of light and truth. Even the gifted youth who are being groomed for leadership, we are told elsewhere in *The Republic*, should not be exposed to the pleasures and rigors of the search for truth through argument until they have mastered the disciplines of music and gymnastics and have matured through responsibility. Otherwise, Plato warns, they will just play with ideas, without any solid foundation or useful result.

While Plato stressed the laborious acquisition of knowledge and understanding as the means to enlightenment, our impatient age has preferred to think of the emancipation to be achieved through education as simply the removal of the chains of illusion (conventional morality and traditional religious worldviews) without the discipline of seeking truth or the confidence that there is truth to be found.

Critical thinking and creative problem-solving are certainly among the primary goals of a good education, but they are not developed casually in the course of an undirected exploration. Nor should we assume that there is an innate human propensity to rise to that challenge. Most of us are intellectually lazy about large spheres of the world around us. For every person who really wants to know how an automobile engine works, there must be a dozen of us who are content if it starts reliably when we turn the key. This is not necessarily bad. Life would be impossible if we could not take much around us for granted, and even new discoveries rest on the discoveries of others that we do not have to repeat.

Deconstructivism

This is the fundamental wrong-headedness of another classic description of education, Rousseau's *Emile*. Raised in isolation, denied the use of books and of direct instruction by his tutor, Emile is expected to learn by following his natural inclinations and responding to situations that his tutor secretly creates for him. The boy, Rousseau tells us, "instructs himself so much the better because he sees nowhere the intention to instruct him." His tutor "ought to give no precepts at all; he ought to make them be discovered."

Here is the authentic note of much current pedagogical advice. The article of faith widely held among educators, especially those who have themselves benefited from the most sophisticated education, is that the teacher should never impose anything on his students, nor suggest to them that there are fixed truths that are worth learning or seeking to discover. Instead he should closely observe the interests of his students and create situations in which they are challenged to use those interests as opportunities for learning. In responding to these challenges, the students will "construct" solutions and even meanings that are uniquely their own and will thus be more deeply and validly

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Teaching facts requires knowledge, which is acquired through rigorous study. All it takes to teach values is the ability to spout your own beliefs and prejudices.

learned than any that might be suggested by the teacher or by the wider culture and tradition. In the process, students will become autonomous human beings, not the mere creatures of their culture, and will develop capacities of critical judgment that will enable them to participate in creating—"constructing"—a better world.

According to a recent account of "constructivism" in the 2000 yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education:

> *There is to be no notion of correct solution, no external standard of right or wrong. As long as a student's solution to a problem achieves a viable goal, it has to be credited. Nor can relevant educational goals be set externally; they are only to be encountered by the student . . . the constructivistic teacher is to make do without any concept of objective truth or falsehood.*

"Even if it were possible to educate children in this way," philosopher Roger Scruton has written, "one thing is certain: that each generation would know less than the one before. . . . And that, of course, is Rousseau's underlying intention—not to liberate the child, but to destroy all intellectual authority, apart from that which resides in the self." As a result, Emile "is the least free of children, hampered at every point in his search for information," and "one can read *Emile* not as a treatise on education, but as a treatise against education." Rousseau's pupil could arrive at a quite incorrect understanding of many natural and social phenomena by relying naively on his experience alone.

Why should we concern ourselves with what Rousseau wrote almost two-and-a-half centuries ago—or indeed with what Plato wrote long before that? Because education is an enterprise, more perhaps than any other save religion, that is shaped by how we choose to think about it.

There is another tradition of thinking about education. It is expressed in the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish practice: "Why do we do these things?" The Passover questions are answered with a story about the experience of a people, a story that has sustained them and given moral direction and meaning to their lives. Does being taught a tradition and taught within a tradition prevent questioning? Of course not; it provides the content that makes questioning fruitful. It can also be found in the classical Greek concept of *paideia* as, in Michael Oakeshott's words, a "serious and orderly initiation into an intellectual, imaginative, moral and emotional inheritance."

"The knowledge-centered teacher," Scruton points out, "is in the business of passing on what he knows—ensuring, in other words, that his knowledge does not die with him." The teacher who loves his subject and cares about his students is concerned that the rising generation not know less than the one that preceded it.

Emancipation is among the elements of a good education; it can help to prepare the way for the exercise of freedom by removing barriers, but it does not of itself make a man or woman free. Education that supports individual freedom and a free society is induction into a culture, not as a straitjacket but as the context of meanings and restraints that make the exercise of real freedom possible. As Philip Rieff has noted, "A culture must communicate ideals . . . those distinctions between right actions and wrong that unite men and permit them the fundamental pleasure of agreement. Culture is another name for a design of motives directing the self outward, toward those communal purposes in which alone the self can be realized and satisfied."

It is for this reason that structural reforms supporting freedom and diversity in education are not enough; they must be paired with a willingness to confront the much more difficult issue of the purposes, the means, and the content of a good education.

Diversity and choice must be paired with common standards, and the content of these must be rich and meaningful. This will require an effort for which the schooling we have received in recent decades almost unfits us, to rediscover and give new life and conviction to those elements of history and culture, the virtues, achievements, and consolations, that have at all times shaped and sustained civilization. This is not a plea for a narrowly Western nostalgia trip, but rather an insistence that only a recovery of the permanent things, of humanity's highest accomplishments, can serve as the basis for a worthy education.

Such a happy outcome would be helped along if opponents of school vouchers would refrain from scare tactics based on unfounded stereotypes about faith-based schooling. Schools that teach in ways shown to be harmful to children should be shut down, but the debate over how to organize a pluralistic education system is not helped by worst-case scenarios. Many Western democracies have faced this challenge successfully, finding an appropriate balance between the autonomy of schools and public accountability, and we can do so too, now that the Supreme Court majority has decided in favor of educational freedom.

–Charles L. Glenn is a professor of education at Boston University and author of The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-based Schools and Social Agencies *(Princeton University Press, 2000).*

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HIGH STAKES in CHICAGO

by BRIAN JACOB

Did Chicago's rising test scores reflect genuine academic improvement?

ILLUSTRATION BY NOAH WOODS

AS THE FIRST LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT TO INTRODUCE a comprehensive accountability system, Chicago provides an exceptional case study of the effects of high-stakes testing—a reform strategy that will become omnipresent as the No Child Left Behind Act is implemented nationwide. One of the most serious criticisms of high-stakes testing is that it leads to "inflated" test scores that do not truly reflect students' knowledge or skills and therefore cannot be generalized to other tests. This article summarizes my research on whether the Chicago accountability system produced "real" gains in student achievement.

The first step in Chicago's accountability effort was to end the practice of "social promotion," whereby students were advanced to the next grade regardless of achievement level. Under the new policy, students in the 3rd, 6th, and 8th grades were required to meet minimum standards in reading and mathematics on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in order to step up to the next grade. Students who didn't meet the standard were required to attend a six-week summer-school program, after which they took the exams again. Those who passed were able to move on to the next grade. Students who again failed to meet the standard were required to repeat the grade, with the exception of 15-year-olds who attended newly created "transition" centers. (Many students in special education and bilingual programs were exempt from these requirements.) In the fall of 1997, roughly 20 percent of

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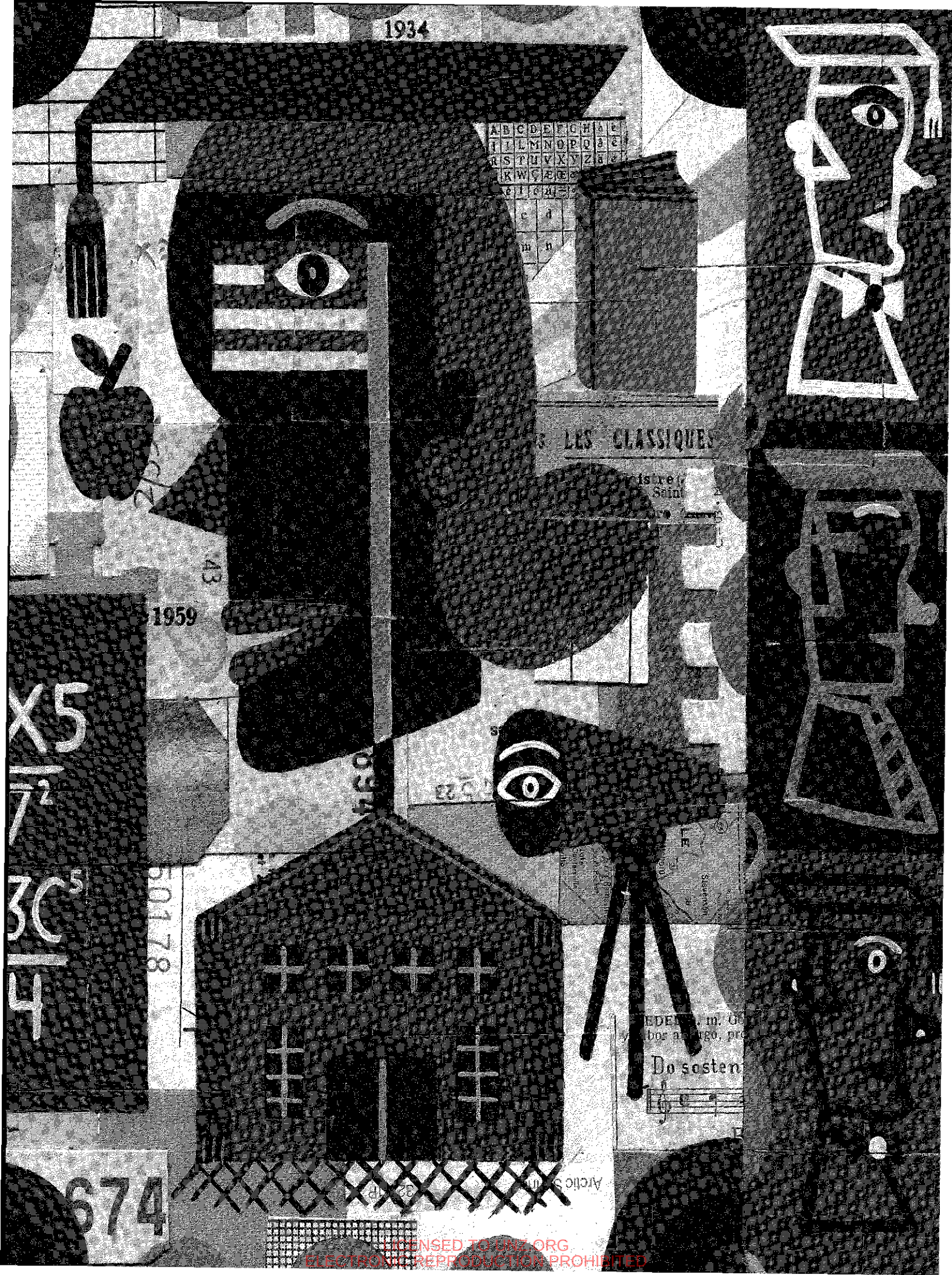

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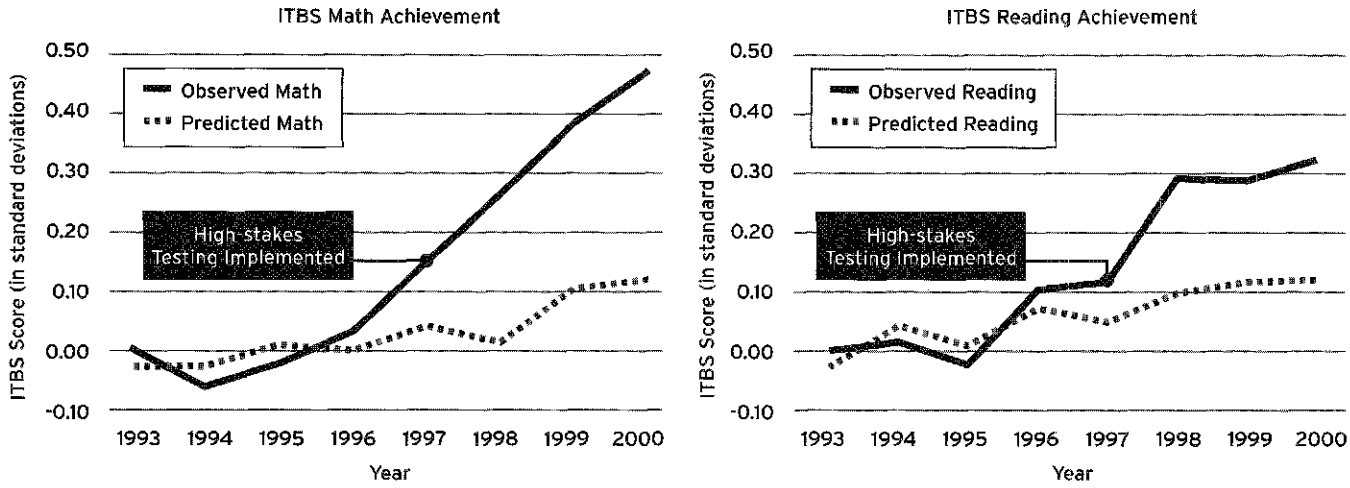
Exceeding Expectations (Figure 1)

After high-stakes testing was implemented, Chicago's scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills increased at a faster-than-predicted pace in both math and reading



Note: The sample includes 3rd, 6th, and 8th grade students from 1993 to 2000, excluding students who were retained in grade. Predicted scores account for changes in student composition and prior achievement levels, and for achievement trends before 1997.

SOURCE: Author

Chicago's 3rd graders and 10 to 15 percent of 6th and 8th graders were held back.

Meanwhile, Chicago also instituted an "academic probation" program designed to hold teachers and schools accountable for student achievement. Schools in which fewer than 15 percent of students scored at or above national norms on the ITBS reading exam were placed on probation. If they did not exhibit sufficient improvement, these schools could be reconstituted, with teachers and school administrators dismissed or reassigned. In the 1996–'97 school year, 71 elementary schools were placed on academic probation. While only recently has Chicago actually reconstituted several schools, as early as 1997 teachers and administrators in probationary schools reported being extremely worried about their job security, and staff in other schools reported a strong desire to avoid probation.

High Stakes and Test Scores

Scores on the ITBS increased substantially in Chicago in the second half of the 1990s. However, many factors besides the accountability policies may have influenced the achievement trends in Chicago. For instance, the population of students may have changed during the period in which high-stakes testing was implemented. An influx of recent immigrants during the mid- to late 1990s may depress the city's test scores, whereas they would be likely to rise with the return of middle-class students to the city. Similarly, policy changes at the state or national level, such as the efforts to reduce class sizes or mandate higher-quality teachers, if effective, would likely lead one to overestimate the impact of Chicago's policies.

The rich set of longitudinal, student-level data available for Chicago allowed me to overcome many of these concerns. I was able to adjust for observable changes in student composition, such as the district's racial and socioeconomic makeup and its students' prior achievement. Moreover, because achievement data were available back to 1990, six years prior to the introduction of the accountability policies, I was able to account for preexisting achievement trends within Chicago. Using this information, I looked for a sharp increase in achievement (a break in trend) following the introduction of high-stakes testing as evidence of a policy effect. Comparing achievement trends in Chicago with those in other urban districts in Illinois as well as in large midwestern cities outside Illinois enabled me to address the concern about actions at the state and federal level that might have influenced achievement.

The sample consisted of students who were in the 3rd, 6th, and 8th grades from 1993 to 2000. The new policy on social promotion caused a large number of low-performing students in these grades to be retained, substantially changing the student composition in these and subsequent grades beginning in the 1997–'98 school year. For this reason I limited the sample to students who were in these three grades for the first time in their school career. Moreover, the results presented here are based on only those students who were tested and whose scores were included by the district for official reporting purposes. (Each year roughly 10 percent of students were not tested, and an additional 10 to 15 percent had scores that were not reported because of a special education

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or bilingual placement.) Analyses using a sample of all students who were tested yielded similar results. While special education placement rates appeared to increase following the introduction of the accountability policy in Chicago, this alone can explain only a small fraction of the observed achievement gains.

Figure 1 plots the predicted versus the observed achievement scores for successive cohorts of Chicago students from 1993 to 2000. Predicted scores were obtained from a regression analysis that accounted for changes in student composition and prior achievement levels as well as overall trends in achievement before the introduction of the accountability program. The figure indicates that neither observable changes in student composition nor preexisting achievement trends in Chicago explain the substantial improvement in student performance since 1997. The trends predicted that achievement in math would decrease or remain flat after 1996. In practice, however, achievement slipped somewhat from 1993 to 1996, but increased sharply after 1996. By 2000, math scores were roughly 0.3 standard deviations higher than predicted, an improvement about one quarter the size of the difference in math performance between Chicago students in consecutive grades in 1995. A similar pattern was apparent in reading. Predicted and observed test scores were relatively flat from 1993 to 1996. In 1997 the gap between observed and predicted scores appeared to widen, and then grew substantially in 1998. By 2000 students were scoring roughly 0.2 standard deviations higher than predicted.

Still, it is possible that the achievement gains in Chicago simply reflected improvements in student performance in the state or nation. The economy was growing throughout the latter half of the 1990s, and there was a considerable emphasis on public education at the federal level. The achievement of a nationwide sample of 4th and 8th grade students with the same racial make-up as

Administrators in probationary schools reported being extremely worried about their job security.

Chicago students, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), increased roughly 0.25 standard deviations in math during the 1990s, though there was no gain in reading.

However, a comparison with other urban districts in Illinois and the Midwest, such as Cincinnati, Gary, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and St. Louis, none of which created a similar accountability system during this period, shows that Chicago's trend is unique (see Figure 2). Trends in Chicago and the other cities tracked one another remarkably well from 1993 to 1996, then began to diverge in 1997. Math and reading achievement in the comparison districts remained relatively constant from 1996 to 2000, while achievement levels in Chicago rose sharply over this period—by roughly 0.3 standard deviations in math and 0.2 standard deviations in reading.

Together, these results suggest that the accountability policy in Chicago led to a substantial increase in math and reading achievement. It appears that the effects were somewhat larger for math than for reading. This is consistent with a number of studies that show larger effects in math than in reading, presumably because reading achievement is more strongly influenced by family and other factors besides schooling. The effects were also somewhat larger for 8th grade students. This is consistent with the fact that 8th graders faced the largest incentives: they could not move to high school with their peers if they failed to meet the standards for promotion.

Checking on Inflation

The accountability policies that the Chicago school system put in place clearly led to an increase in scores on the ITBS. Nevertheless, critics of high-stakes testing wonder whether those increases reflect real gains in students' knowledge and skills—gains that ought to translate to students' performance in school and on other exams. When test scores are "inflated"—by, say, cheating or intense preparation that is geared to a specific exam—observed achievement gains are misleading because they do not reflect a more general mastery of the subject.

Researchers have found considerable evidence of test-score inflation throughout the country during the past two decades. In 1987, for example, John Jacob Cannell discovered what has become known as the "Lake Wobegon" effect—the fact that a disproportionate number of states and districts report being "above the national norm." More recently, researchers have demonstrated that Kentucky and Texas made substantially larger gains on state tests (the KIRIS and TAAS, respectively) than on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This is one reason why the No Child Left Behind legislation requires states to consider NAEP scores along with scores from state exams.

An approach commonly used to investigate score inflation is to compare student performance trends across exams. The notion is that if the gains on the high-stakes exam are not accompanied by gains on other achievement exams, then the gains may not be generalizable.

In Chicago, elementary students have traditionally taken two exams. The district has administered the ITBS, one of several standardized, multiple-choice exams used by districts across the country, to students in grades 3 to 8 for many years. Chicago's accountability sanctions were determined solely by student performance on the ITBS, making it the

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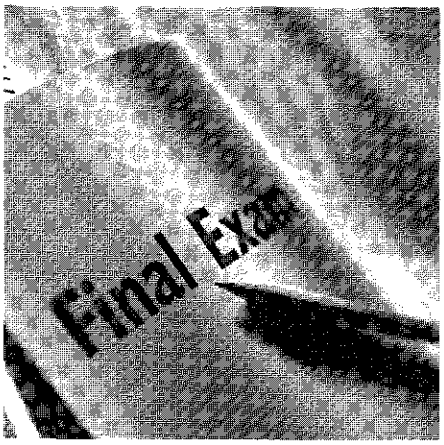
high-stakes exam. At the same time, Chicago elementary students took another standardized, multiple-choice exam administered by the state, known as the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP). Before 1996 the IGAP was arguably the higher-stakes exam, even though there were no direct consequences for students or schools tied to the IGAP, since results from it appeared annually in local newspapers. After 1996 the IGAP clearly became the low-stakes exam for students and teachers in Chicago in comparison with the ITBS.

In 1993, Chicago students scored between 0.4 and 0.8 standard deviations below students in other urban districts on the IGAP. During the mid-1990s, the achievement gap between Chicago and other districts appeared to narrow. However, this trend began, at least in grades 3 and 6, before the introduction of high-stakes testing in these grades, and there was no noticeable break in the trend in 1997, the first year of the accountability system. Achievement scores in grade 8, particularly in reading, showed some break beginning in 1996 (the accountability policy began for 8th graders in 1996).

What can be inferred from these trends? On the one hand, a simple comparison of student achievement at the beginning and end of the decade suggests that Chicago experienced roughly comparable improvement on the IGAP and the ITBS. This might lead to the conclusion that the achievement gains on both exams were largely generalizable. On the other hand, a comparison of how achievement in the late 1990s changed in relation to the preexisting trends on each exam suggests that the accountability policy had a large effect on ITBS scores but little if any effect on IGAP scores. This might lead to the conclusion that the ITBS gains in Chicago were driven largely by test-score inflation.

The data do not necessarily support either conclusion, however. One problem is that the ITBS and IGAP are different in both content and format. In mathematics, the ITBS places more emphasis on computation, while the IGAP appears to give greater weight to problem-solving skills. Indeed, the computation items on the IGAP are often asked in the context of a word problem. The general format of the reading comprehension sections on the two exams are similar—both ask students to read passages and then answer questions about the passage—but the IGAP consists of fewer, but longer passages, whereas the ITBS contains a greater number of passages, each of which is shorter. Perhaps more important, the questions on the IGAP may have multiple correct responses in comparison with the ITBS, on which there is only one correct response. The fact that the two exams displayed different trends before the introduction of the accountability policy suggests that they measure somewhat different concepts.



Neither changes in student composition nor preexisting achievement trends in Chicago explain the substantial improvement in student performance since 1997.

The natural solution would be to adjust the ITBS and IGAP scores to account for such differences in content. For example, one might estimate what the IGAP scores would have been if both exams had the same distribution of question types. In practice, this exercise is probably only feasible in mathematics, where test items can be categorized with relative precision. Moreover, this requires detailed item-level information for both exams, which is not available for the IGAP.

A second difficulty in interpreting the differences in performance trends between the two exams involves student effort. Students undoubtedly began to increase test-day effort for the ITBS after 1996. It is unclear how, if at all, effort levels changed on the IGAP. One might imagine that effort increased somewhat given the new climate surrounding testing. Equally plausible, however, is the idea that effort has declined now that teachers and students view IGAP scores as largely irrelevant. If student effort on the ITBS increased at the same time that effort on the IGAP decreased, one would expect more rapid achievement growth on the ITBS even if the exams were identical or learning were completely generalizable.

In sum, given the differences in composition between the two exams along with possible changes in student effort over the time period, it is extremely difficult to determine what one should *expect* to see under the best of circumstances.

Meaningful Improvement

It is important not to exaggerate the importance of the fact that gains may not generalize to other exams. Even if an accountability program produces true, meaningful gains, we would not expect gains on one test to be completely reflected in data from other tests because of the inherent differences across exams. Even the most comprehensive achieve-

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ment exam can cover only a fraction of the possible skills and topics within a particular domain. For this reason, different exams often lead to different inferences about student mastery, regardless of whether any type of accountability policy is in place.

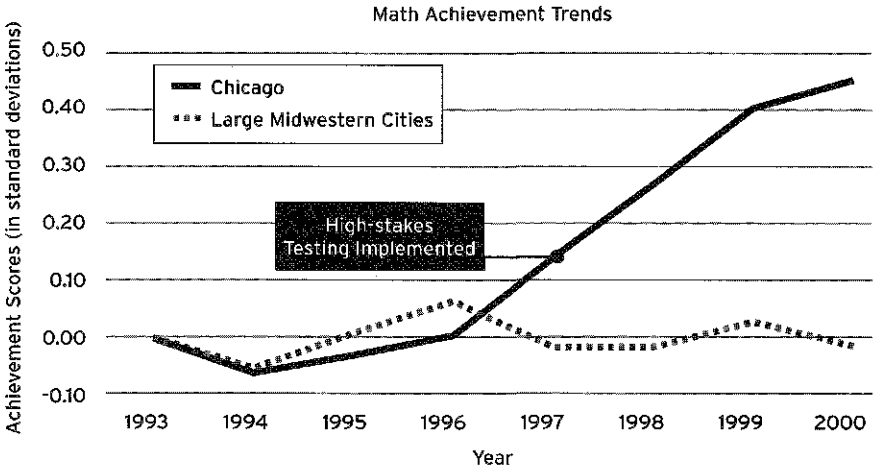
Yet in discussing how to interpret test-score gains, even testing experts occasionally slip into language that seems to neglect the value of gains in particular areas. Harvard scholar Daniel Koretz notes, "When scores increase, students clearly have improved the mastery of the sample included in the test. This is of no interest, however, unless the improvement justifies the inference that students have attained greater mastery of the domain the test is intended to represent." Does this mean that if children improve their ability to add fractions, interpret line graphs, or identify the main idea of a written passage, this is of *no* interest?

Most people would agree that these improvements, while limited to specific skills or topics, are indeed important. This suggests an alternative criterion by which to judge changes in student performance—namely, that achievement gains on test items that measure particular skills or understandings may be *meaningful* even if the student's overall test score does not fully generalize to other exams. To be meaningful, achievement gains must result from greater student understanding, and they must be important in some educational sense.

Test-score gains that result from cheating on the part of students or teachers would of course not be considered meaningful. Similarly, most people would not view as meaningful increases in performance that result from an improvement in testing conditions. A less clear-cut case involves student effort. Various studies have shown that accountability policies lead students to take standardized exams more seriously, either by working harder during the school year or by simply concentrating harder during the actual exam (or both). While the former clearly represents meaningful gains, the latter may not. One could argue that teaching students to try hard in critical situations is a useful thing. But the observed improvements in student performance would represent greater effort rather than greater understanding.

Best in Show (Figure 2)

Chicago experienced stronger gains than other large urban school districts in the Midwest in the years after high-stakes testing was implemented.



Note: The achievement series for large midwestern cities includes data from Cincinnati, Gary, Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Milwaukee. The sample includes all grades from 3 to 8 for which data on test scores were available. Trends in reading were similar to mathematics.

SOURCE: Author

A Close Look at the Questions

One way to assess the meaningfulness of reported achievement gains is to see how changes in student performance varied across individual test questions. While item analysis is not a new technique, it may provide important insight in assessing the effects of testing policies.

Consider test completion rates on the ITBS. Since there is no penalty for guessing on the ITBS (total score is determined solely by the number correct), the simplest way for a student to increase his or her expected score is to make sure that no items are left blank. Before the introduction of the accountability policy in Chicago, a surprisingly high proportion of students left one or more items of the ITBS exam blank. In 1994 only 58 and 77 percent of 8th grade students completed the entire math and reading exams, respectively.

Test-completion rates increased sharply under the high-stakes testing regime. For instance, the number of 8th graders who completed the entire math exam increased to nearly 63 percent in 1998, with the vast majority of students leaving only one or two items blank. The greatest impact was for low-achieving students, largely because the overwhelming majority of higher-achieving students had completed the exam before the onset of high-stakes testing.

Can guessing explain the observed achievement gains in Chicago? If the increased test scores were due solely to guessing, the percent of questions answered would increase, but the percent of questions answered *correctly* (as a percent of all *answered* questions) would remain constant or perhaps even decline. In Chicago, the percent of questions answered has increased, but the percent answered correctly has also gone up, suggesting that the higher completion rates were not entirely due to guessing. A more detailed analysis suggests that guessing could explain only a small

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fraction of the overall achievement gains.

Next consider student performance across skill areas. The ITBS math section measures students' understanding of five broad areas: number concepts, estimation, problem-solving, data interpretation, and computation. Questions in the reading section are broken into three broad categories: understanding factual information, evaluating written material (identifying the author's viewpoint, determining the main idea), and drawing inferences (inferring the feelings, motives and traits of characters in a story, predicting likely outcomes).

The size of achievement gains following the introduction of the accountability policy differed across item areas. Students improved 7.1 percentage points on items involving number concepts and 6.8 percentage points on items involving computation. By contrast, students gained only 4.3 percentage points on problem-solving items and roughly 5.5 percentage points on data interpretation and estimation questions. Overall, these results suggest that math teachers may have focused on specific content areas in response to the accountability policy. Given the considerable weight placed on mathematical computation and number concepts in the ITBS, perhaps along with the perceived ease of teaching these skills, it would not be surprising if teachers chose to focus their energy in these areas. In reading, students made comparable improvement (roughly 5 percentage points) across question type, suggesting that test preparation may have played a larger role in math than in reading.

These aggregate results provide some insight, but the accountability policy affected students and schools differently based on previous achievement levels. In particular, observers have expressed concerns that the lowest-performing schools have responded to the policy by simply focusing on test preparation. If this were true, one would expect the patterns of test-score gains across items to differ for low- versus high-performing students and schools.

Low- and moderate-achieving schools made gains greater than those of high-achieving schools under the accountability policy.

To explore this, I examined achievement changes by item type for low-, moderate-, and high-performing schools, as measured by the percentage of students scoring at or above national norms on the ITBS reading exam in 1995. Schools with fewer than 20 percent of students meeting norms were defined as low achieving; those with 20 to 30 percent meeting norms were moderate achieving; and those with at least 30 percent of students' meeting norms were high achieving (this created three groups of equal size). Two patterns stood out. In both reading and mathematics, low- and moderate-achieving schools made overall gains greater than those of high-achieving schools under the accountability policy. This is consistent with the incentives generated by the policy, which placed low-achieving schools on probation. Regardless of previous achievement level, however, all schools appeared to have improved more in computation and number concepts than in other math concepts. Interestingly, while low-achieving schools improved in areas such as problem-solving and data analysis, higher-achieving schools made little if any improvement in these areas. For reading, regardless of school performance level, students showed similar improvement on items measuring factual, inferential, and evaluative understandings.

Conclusions

Chicago's experience with accountability provides some lessons for other districts and states as they begin to implement the mandates of No Child Left Behind. The results of my analysis suggest that high-stakes testing substantially increases math and reading performance, with gains on the order of 0.20 to 0.30 standard deviations. Item-level analysis of test-score gains in Chicago during the 1990s reveals that math gains were disproportionately focused in certain areas, and therefore may not generalize to alternative performance measures, particularly those that tap other domains of knowledge. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the gains were not meaningful. They may well reflect an authentic increase in certain areas of knowledge and skills, underscoring the need for careful attention to the specific content of the exams used to hold schools and students accountable. Furthermore, it is important to note that the performance of Chicago's students on alternative assessments continued to increase in absolute terms, which may mean that there was no substantial tradeoff in skills learned.

The broader lesson is that educators and policymakers must look beyond aggregate measures of student performance to assess the nature of observed performance trends, and they must carefully distinguish between concerns of generalizability and concerns of meaningfulness. Overall, these results suggest that high-stakes testing has the potential to improve student learning meaningfully, but attempts to generalize the results to other learning must be approached with caution.

–Brian Jacob is an assistant professor of public policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and an associate with the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in Cambridge, Mass. This article is based on a paper presented at a June 2002 conference of Harvard's Program on Education Policy and Governance and an NBER Working Paper, "Accountability, Incentives, and Behavior."

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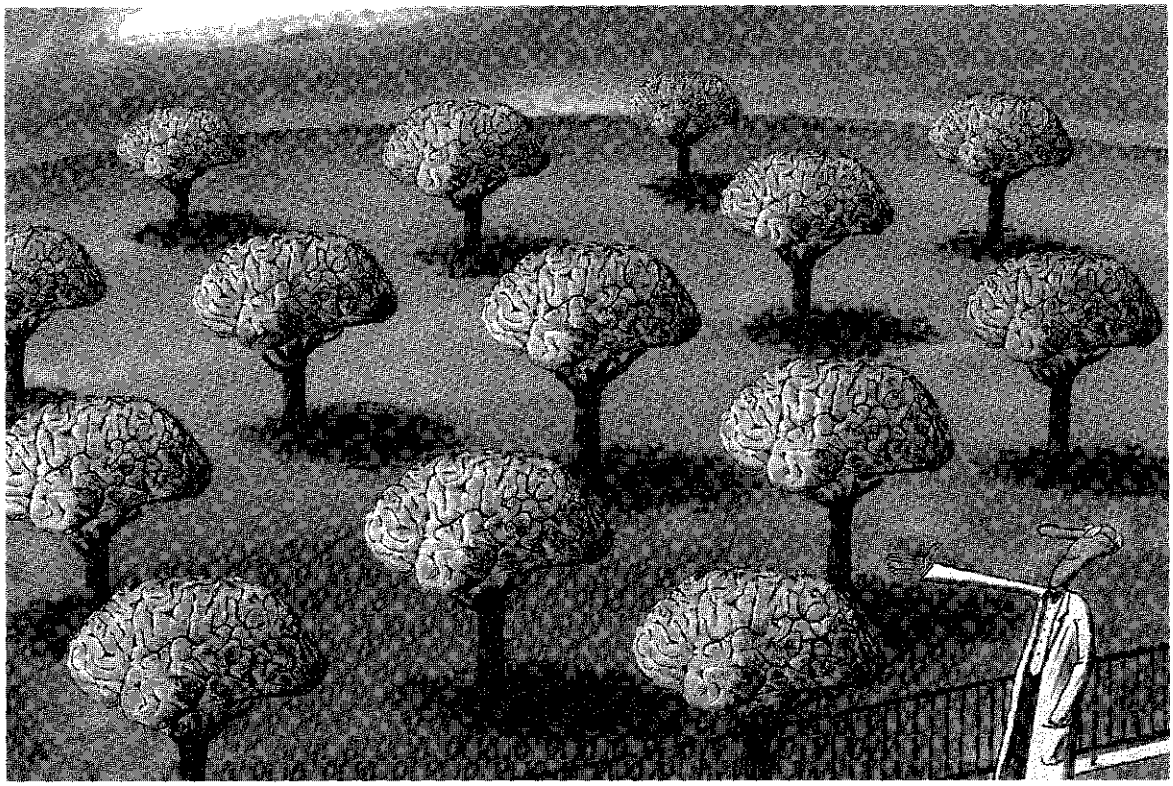

ILLUSTRATION BY CLAUDE HENRI-SAUNIER

The Human Capital Century

U.S. schools led the world during much of the 20th century.
Will they continue to do so?

by CLAUDIA GOLDIN

The 20th century became the human-capital century. No nation today—no matter how poor—can afford *not* to educate its youth at the secondary-school level and beyond. Yet at the start of the 20th century even the world's richest countries—richer than many poor nations are today—had not yet begun the transition to mass secondary-school education. With one notable exception: the United States.

The United States accomplished the feat of mass education by creating a new and unique education pattern or gauge—I will call it a "template"—that broke from the templates of Europe. The U.S. template was shaped by egalitarian institutions (a commitment to equality of opportunity); by the factor endowments of the New World (lots of land relative to labor); and by republican ideology, meaning democracy and pluralism.

For much of the 20th century this template was synonymous with a set of "virtues." That is, the template consisted of characteristics that were virtuous. Among the virtues was mass secondary education that was:

- publicly funded,
- managed by numerous small, fiscally independent districts,
- open and forgiving,

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- academic yet practical in its curriculum,
- secular in control, and
- gender neutral in its admissions.

I call these characteristics virtues because they promoted and furthered mass education and thereby increased social mobility and enhanced economic growth.

What brought about the human-capital century? Why and how did the United States lead the world in mass education for much of the 20th century? And what does this history mean for the future of education in the United States?

The Human-Capital Century

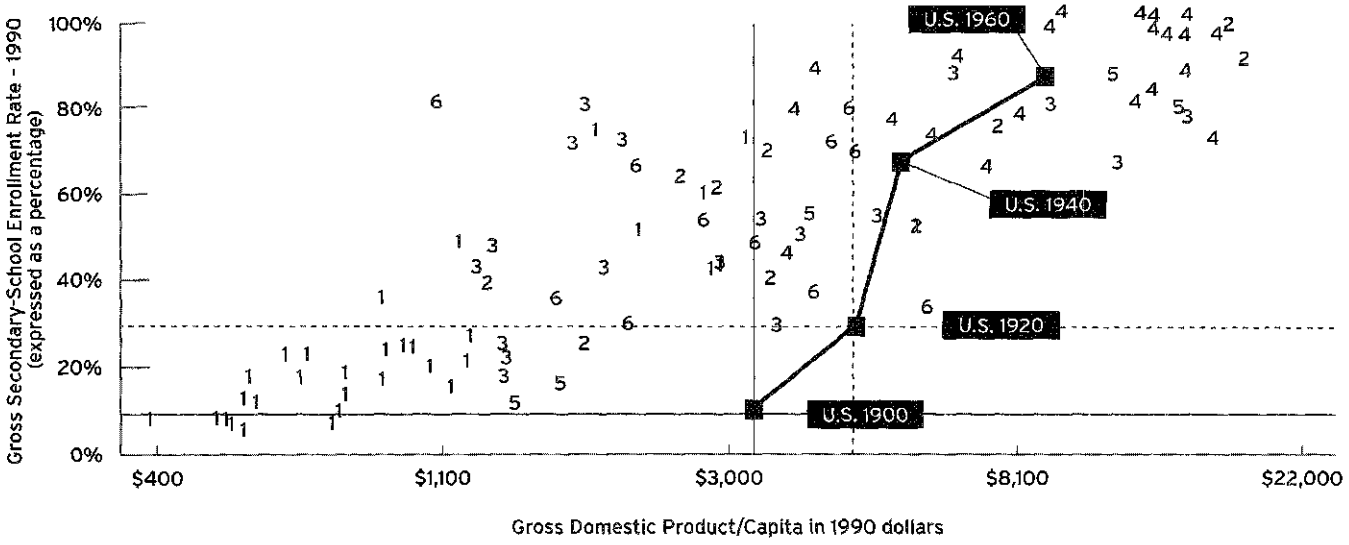
Even poor countries today have a far greater rate of secondary-school enrollment than did the rich countries of the past. Consider Figure 1, on which the horizontal axis is real per-capita income in 1990 and the vertical axis is the rate of high-school enrollment in 1990. The lowest of the four points in the figure represents the real per-capita income and the high-school enrollment rate in the United States in 1900, just before the expansion of secondary-school education as a result of the U.S. "high-school movement."

The northwest and southeast quadrants of Figure 1 relative to the data point for the United States in the year 1900 have unambiguous interpretations. I term the northwest quadrant the "good" quadrant and the southeast the "bad" quadrant. Nations found in the good quadrant had lower real per-capita incomes in 1990 than did the United States in 1900 but a higher enrollment rate in 1990 than the United States had in 1900. In other words, they are currently investing more in education relative to their per-capita income than the United States did at the beginning of the human-capital century. Their incomes may be low now, but they are making the investments necessary to nurture growth in the future.

By contrast, nations in the southeast quadrant, the bad quadrant, would have had higher per-capita incomes in 1990 than the United States did in 1900 but lower current enrollment rates than the United States had in 1900. In other words, their investment in education relative to their per-capita income would have been lower than in the United States at the turn of the century. Note that there are no nations in the bad quadrant and many nations in the good quadrant. One can do the same thought experiment for other years. Figure 1 also contains a data point for the United States in 1920. Once again, no country is located in the bad quadrant, the one with higher per-capita incomes and lower enrollment rates. The data point for 1940 places just a few countries in the bad quadrant. Only when the 1960 data point for the United States is considered

Investing in Human Capital (Figure 1)

Today, most poor countries have higher rates of secondary-school enrollment than the United States did in 1900, suggesting that they are making investments to nurture economic growth in the future.



Notes: Numbers represent the geographic locations of countries: 1 = Africa, 2 = Central and North America and the Caribbean, 3 = Asia, including the non-African Middle East, 4 = Europe, 5 = Oceania, and 6 = South America. Enrollment rates and GDP per capita are plotted for the United States for the years 1900, 1920, 1940, and 1960. Data for all other countries are plotted for 1990.

SOURCES: United Nations Organization for Education, Science, and Culture (UNESCO); Penn World Tables

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do more than two or three countries fall into the southeast quadrant.

Two highly useful facts are embedded in these data and the thought experiment. The first fact is that secondary schooling took off in the United States from around 1910 to 1940. The second fact comes from the thought experiment. The bad quadrant is virtually empty until the point of comparison—the enrollment rate in the United States—reaches high levels. Meanwhile, the good quadrant is often brimming with countries. This suggests that even poor nations and poor people today are investing in education at higher rates than the United States did at the turn of the century. Thus the 20th century became the human-capital century. Nations can no longer afford to be left behind in educating their people because today's technologies are produced by well-educated countries and are designed for an educated labor force.

The notion that skills matter, that the wealth of a nation is embodied in its people and that only an educated people can adopt new technologies (and adapt them and innovate them), was voiced in America at the dawn of the 20th century. In 1906 the governor of Massachusetts appointed a commission to study technical education and assigned the chairmanship to Carroll Wright, one of the greatest U.S. labor statisticians of all time, the first Massachusetts commissioner of labor, and the first commissioner of the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The report concluded, "We know that the only assets of Massachusetts are its climate and its skilled labor." (Give the report's author half credit.) The modern concept of the wealth of nations had emerged. What mattered was capital possessed by people—*human capital*.

The New Economy

In the 19th century, machines and natural resources, not people, mattered to the industrial giants—Britain, Germany, France, and the United States. It was not until the early 1900s that attention began to shift to the education of the people at the secondary and higher levels.

A remarkable notion had emerged in the United States around 1900: that schooling could make the ordinary office clerk, shop-floor worker, and even the farmer more productive.

A "new" economy—as it was termed by contemporaries—had emerged in the *early* 20th century. It involved a greater use of science by industry, a proliferation of academic disciplines, a series of critical inventions and their diffusion (for example, small electric motors, the internal combustion engine, the airplane, various chemical processes), the rise of big business, and the growth of retailing. A host of demand-side factors increased the relative demand for educated labor and enhanced the returns to education and training.

These changes did more than increase the demand for a small cadre of scientists and engineers; they increased the demand for skilled and educated labor among the mass of workers. Firms began to seek employees with a host of general skills. They sought a white-collar and clerical staff capable of using the latest office machinery, with modern office skills (such as stenography and typing), polished grammar, and some mathematical prowess. They also sought blue-collar workers who could decipher manuals, who knew algebra, and who had a mastery of mechanical drawing and a familiarity with chemical and electrical fundamentals.

A remarkable notion had emerged around 1900: that schooling could make the ordinary office clerk, shop-floor worker, and even the farmer more productive. The odd thing is that even though most industrial nations acknowledged the change from physical capital to human capital, only one did much about it until well into the 20th century.

U.S. Leadership

The demand for educated labor in the United States increased, and almost nationwide there was an outpouring of public and primarily local resources to build and staff high schools. These schools were academic (not industrial), free, secular, gender neutral, open, and forgiving. The education change was known then as the high-school movement. In the United States as a whole, the enrollment rate for youths in all secondary schools—public high schools, private secular and religious high schools, and the preparatory departments of colleges and universities—soared from 1910 to 1940 (see Figure 2). The graduation rate, expressed as a fraction of the relevant age group, also increased substantially during this period. In 1910 just one American youth in ten was a high-school graduate. By 1940, the median youth had a high-school diploma. It is no wonder that those who lived through the early part of the period described the change, in a 1914 report from the California Department of Public Instruction, as "one of the most remarkable educational movements of modern times."

The high-school movement was not just an urban phenomenon. Nor was it just a New England phenomenon, though it began there. It spread quickly from New England towns to the rich agricultural areas of the Midwest and

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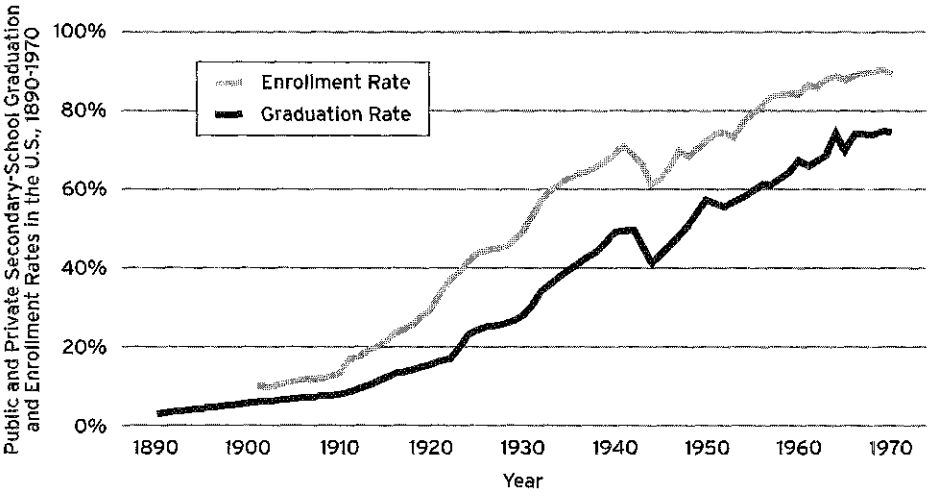
to the western states. Because the southern states had lower levels of education attainment for much of the 20th century and because the high-school movement diffused slowly throughout the South, the national data in Figure 2 give a somewhat misleading impression of the speed at which the high-school movement spread throughout the rest of the country. The spread of the high school was considerably faster in most other regions of the country, and graduation and enrollment rates were higher. Even before 1930 the graduation rate for 18-year-olds in many parts of the North, Midwest, and West exceeded 50 percent.

In 1910, when the data on graduation rates begin, New England was the leading region. But by the mid-1910s the rich states of the Pacific had closed in on New England. By the 1920s even the sparsely settled and agricultural states of the West North Central (states such as Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska) had exceeded the rates achieved in New England. Only the Middle Atlantic states were left behind, and they caught up during the massive unemployment of the Great Depression, when jobs for teens evaporated overnight. In 1940, as the world braced for yet another war, America could boast of having the most educated workforce in the world. It accomplished this feat even though, for much of the period, it had open doors to the poor of the world. Its success in mass secondary education resulted from its education template and the associated virtues.

In contrast to the United States, the templates of Europe were characterized by quasi-public or private funding and provision; by the high standards of an unforgiving system; by the unity of church and state; and by a "boys come first" attitude. The German, British, and French systems, while different in their details, had much in common—strict standards, individual accountability, severe tracking at early ages, and higher education for a small, elite corps.

Graduation and Enrollment Rates in the U.S. (Figure 2)

The United States established its leadership of the human-capital century by expanding secondary school to the masses.



SOURCES: Author; U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, 1993

Most of these systems had centralized bureaucracies and finances, and some had elaborate apprenticeship systems.

By the mid-1950s the U.S. lead in the human-capital century was astoundingly large. A wide gap existed between Europe and the United States in the education of youth. Across the 12 European countries reported in Figure 3, only one, Sweden, had a full-time, general education enrollment rate for 15- to 19-year-olds that exceeded 20 percent. Just two nations had a full-time general and technical education enrollment rate that exceeded 30 percent. The U.S. enrollment rate for the same age group in 1955 was almost 80 percent. Even if one added to the European data youths in part-time technical education, enrollment rates would still be considerably lower than in the United States. Only in the past three decades has the difference between the secondary-school enrollment rates of the United States and Europe been largely eliminated. As a consequence, the lower quality of U.S. secondary-school education has become a major domestic issue in the United States.

Why did the United States at the turn of the 20th century break from the education and training templates of Europe and pioneer a novel form of secondary education? Why did Europeans believe that Americans were "wasting" resources by educating their masses? Why did Americans reject a highly specific, on-the-job, industrial form of education (such as the British, Danish, and German apprenticeship systems) in favor of one that was general, school-based, and academic? The answers to these questions concern basic differences between the New World and the Old World.

Formal, general education is more valued when geographic mobility and technical change are greater. School, not an apprenticeship and on-the-job training, enables a youth to change occupations over a lifetime, to garner skills different from those of his or her parents, and to respond rapidly to technological change. The U.S. template was not wasteful in the technologically dynamic, socially open, and geographically mobile New World setting. In fact, it probably enhanced the dynamism of the New World.

In short, a host of changes beginning

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in the late 19th century increased the demand for certain skills and knowledge. A set of republican institutions enabled the United States to respond to the increased demand for skill. Together with a set of New World preconditions (such as a high ratio of land to labor), these favorable circumstances led the United States to respond to the technological imperative in a particular way. By the early 20th century the United States began to endow a large fraction of its youth with skills in formal, school-based, academic settings, using a system termed here the U.S. template. The United States achieved mass secondary (and later mass higher) education because of a set of virtues. The virtues enabled the supply-side institutions to respond to the demand-side shift.

How did the virtues accomplish so much? Take the virtue of decentralization, for example. If public support for school expansion were less than 50 percent in a state, the existence of numerous small, fiscally independent districts would enable high schools to diffuse. People choose where to live, and small districts are generally more homogeneous than large districts with respect to income, ethnicity, religion, and cultural values. It is likely, therefore, that individual preferences for public goods are more similar the smaller the geographic area is. Greater homogeneity means that the public good—education in this case—might be funded by some of the districts, whereas there would be no funding if the district were the size of the state. In much of Europe, in contrast to the United States, decisions about education were highly centralized. In Britain and France, for example, national legislation was required to fund expansion of secondary education, and initially it spread more slowly there than in the United States.

About 130,000 separate school districts existed around 1925, but many were tiny common school districts of the open country, and some did not have the ability to set their own tax rates. That still left tens of thousands of fiscally independent school districts large enough to have established a public secondary school. These relatively small, fiscally independent school districts implicitly competed with one another to attract residents.

In work that Larry Katz and I have done using archival records from a unique state census, we found that an additional year of high school at the start of the high-school movement in 1915 added more than 12 percent to the earnings of young men (18- to 34-year-olds). This return was almost double that of a year of secondary school in 1955. Returns were substantial even within various occupations. That is, even if a youth were somehow destined to be a blue-collar or a white-collar worker, there would still be significant returns to further education. The return to education, furthermore, was as high for farmers as it was for those in nonagricultural occupations.

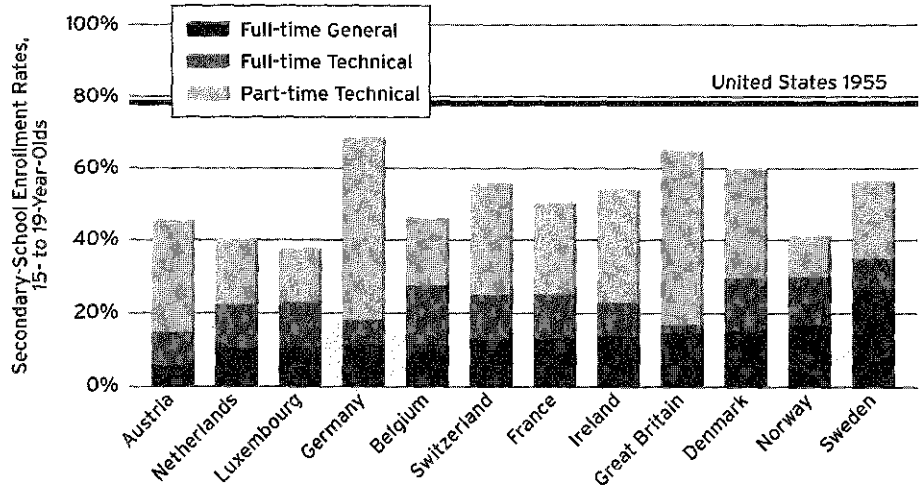
What impact did the U.S. template have on economic growth and individual welfare? Consider the change in economic inequality. As more individuals were educated in the first half of the 20th century, inequality declined. The structure of wages narrowed, wage ratios for higher-skilled relative to lesser-skilled positions fell, and the returns to education decreased. All of the data sets I have examined show declining inequality for the period from the late 1910s to the 1950s. They also show rising inequality after the mid-1970s. If we think of the wage structure as being the result of a race between technology and education, then education ran faster than technology in the first half of the century, and technology ran faster than education in the second half. Interestingly, technology does not appear to have accelerated after the 1970s. Instead, advances in attainment of education slowed down.

Have Our Virtues Become Vices?

The U.S. system of education for much of the 20th century was characterized by what I have called virtues. The U.S. template succeeded during the first half of the 20th century and for some time after, performing better than those of other nations. The system produced far more

Secondary-School Enrollment Rates in 1955 (Figure 3)

The rate of enrollment in full-time general secondary school in the United States reached nearly 80 percent by 1955. Meanwhile, much of Europe was still below 20 percent. Even if we include full-time and part-time technical education, few European nations had enrollment rates above 60 percent.



SOURCES: Author; U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, 1993

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educated citizens and workers. It did not, by and large, reinforce class distinctions. Instead, it enabled economic and geographic mobility and resulted in a large decrease in inequality in economic outcomes. It may also have increased technological change and thus labor productivity, although that is far more difficult to prove.

The virtues I have mentioned include: education that was publicly funded and provided, an open and forgiving system, an academic yet practical curriculum, numerous small, fiscally independent school districts, and the secular (not church) control of schools. However, these characteristics are no longer seen as uniformly virtuous. To some they now constrain, rather than further, education. For example:

- Public or community funding and public provision were the hallmarks of the common school system. Now, however, vouchers—public funding but private provision—and charter schools are being used and considered for use to increase competition.

- An open and forgiving system without tracking at early ages was seen as egalitarian and nonelitist. But this type of system is now viewed as lacking standards and accountability. Almost all states today have standards for promotion from one grade to the next, high-school graduation, school funding, and teacher retention. Some of these standards are strict and have serious consequences for those who do not pass.

- A general, academic education for all may enhance flexibility at the beginning, but may, in the end, leave many behind. It may have worsened rising inequality in the 1980s. Some have recently espoused technical and vocational training for certain youths.

The egalitarian, decentralized system of education in the United States enabled economic and geographic mobility and resulted in a large decrease in economic inequality.

- Although a decentralized system of small, fiscally independent districts competing for residents once fostered investments in education, this system is now seen as producing serious funding inequities. Most states now have equalization plans, but some plans (such as that in California) have led many to exit the public system and may actually reduce spending per child in poor districts.

- The separation of church and state encouraged a "common" education for all. However, an insistence on the secular control of public funds meant that Catholic and other church-based schools could not receive publicly funded vouchers, even in academically failing school districts where other private schools are unavailable to poor students. The recent Supreme Court ruling in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* may widen the use of vouchers by denominational schools, not just by those in failing school districts.

In short, the nation appears to be abandoning many of the very virtues that catapulted the United States to the summit of the human-capital century. It is possible that these attributes were virtues only at a time when the nation had a very particular need—to bring general, formal education to the masses. Now they may be vices as the nation attends not only to the number of children in school, but also to the quality of the education they are receiving. A whole new set of virtues may arise in the 21st century, qualities that focus the nation on education performance and student achievement.

For now, the nation appears confused about which attributes to elevate to the status of virtue. In the past, the decentralized nature of the education system was a virtue in the sense that it promoted higher enrollment rates. Today, reformers still pin their hopes on other strategies that count on the power of decentralized decisionmaking, such as school choice, charter schools, and vouchers. By contrast, the standards and testing of the accountability movement are centralizing power within the system and creating a more uniform curriculum at the state level. Likewise, efforts to equalize funding across school districts place more financial responsibility at the state level while removing financial discretion from localities. There are potential pitfalls in all of these approaches. For instance, before moving ahead with voucher plans that involve religious schools, the nation needs to think harder about separating theology from geology, geometry, and biology. Likewise, although funding disparities among school districts may be unjust, removing local fiscal incentives may alienate suburban taxpayers and erode their support for public education. Without caution and care, today's new virtues may become vices as well.

–Claudia Goldin is a professor of economics at Harvard University. This article is adapted from an address given on June 19, 2002, at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's 47th annual conference series. A different version is forthcoming in the conference proceedings, Education in the 21st Century: Meeting the Challenges of a Changing World.

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by ROBERT MARANTO

Lobbying in Disguise

The American Federation of Teachers "studies" charter schools

Do Charter Schools Measure Up? The Charter School Experiment After 10 Years

American Federation of Teachers, 2002.

Teacher unions are pulled in different directions. On the one hand, many of their staffers have devoted their lives to education and are genuinely committed to improving schools. Indeed, under the late Al Shanker, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) was known for tough-minded talk on issues like standards, testing, and failing schools.

On the other hand, as unions their primary mission is to protect the welfare of their members. Sometimes the interests of teachers and students are aligned, but not always. For instance, unions have steadfastly defended policies that undermine education reform, such as: No junior teacher, however competent and in demand, should ever be paid more than someone who has been on the job longer. No teacher, however talented and knowledgeable, may enter a classroom without state certification. In a 1997 speech, Bob Chase of the National Education Association (NEA) declared, "If there is a bad teacher in one of our schools, then we must do something about it." The union acted as if this were a bold, meaningful concession. To the rest of us it was a no-brainer.

The national unions deliver the occasional encomiums to accountability. However, such rhetoric is rarely matched by action among their relatively autonomous local satellites, like the United Federation of Teachers in New York. Charged with negotiating actual contracts, these tend to behave more like traditional urban unions, defending their members at every turn, no matter what the consequences for schools. After all, serious academic standards might highlight the poor performance of some teachers, who might face sanctions (like—shock!—being fired). Likewise, school choice would empower parents, who might choose nonunionized private and charter schools.

Nowhere have we seen a better example of the unions' clumsy attempts to straddle representation and reform than in the AFT's handling of charter schools. Consider the AFT's recently released "study" of charter schools, *Do Charter Schools Measure Up? The Charter School Experiment After 10 Years*. The report touts the fact that Shanker supported charter schools, but then claims that "these schools are a diversion from reformers' and policymakers' efforts to improve education in America." It alleges that a review of the research on charter schools leads to the conclusions that, overall, charter schools: 1) fail to raise student achievement more than traditional district schools do; 2) aren't innovative and don't pass innovations along to district schools; 3) exacerbate the racial and ethnic isolation of students; 4) provide a worse environment for teachers than district schools; and 5) spend

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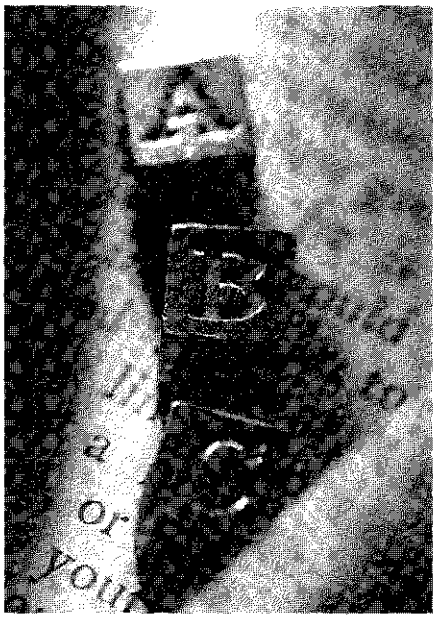
more on administration and less on instruction than public schools. With all this evidence apparently stacked against charter schools, it seems downright responsible of the AFT to call for a moratorium on further charter school expansion "until more convincing evidence of their effectiveness and viability is presented."

If only that were all true. The AFT's conclusions, you'll see, are based on a selective reading of the research, shameless spinning of research findings, and a failure to place findings in context. The report ignores the judgments of parents and students, uses bizarre definitions of such terms as innovation and accountability, compares charter schools with the ideal school rather than with traditional district schools, and presents confusing and out-of-context discussions of such admittedly complex matters as school finance and student achievement. In short, the report poses as serious research, but is more about lobbying than a search for clarity.

Definitions

There is no doubt that the AFT cites some good research, usually accurately. For instance, the AFT acknowledges, after some hemming and hawing, that most charter schools spend less public money than most district schools. The AFT admits that charter schools are generally not "creaming" the more capable students. The AFT is right that charters are no panacea, as a few charter boosters had predicted. The AFT expresses legitimate though perhaps overstated concerns about the viability and effectiveness of for-profit education.

In addition, the AFT rightly points out that not enough has been done to measure how much learning occurs in charter schools. But the analytical flaw here repeats itself throughout the report. The AFT persistently compares the situation in charter schools with that of some mythical school district where only innovative, research-tested curricula are used; students of all races, ethnicities, and income levels mix happily; and schools and school employees are held accountable for student performance. Yes, the performance of charter schools has been inadequately measured. Yet the same is true of district schools, and the unions are partly responsible. They have fought off efforts to yardstick student achievement for decades, fearing that good measures will make some teachers and schools look bad. The AFT's sudden cheerleading for accountability in the case of charter schools reminds me of the old Yiddish definition of "chutzpah": a young man kills his parents and then asks the judge for leniency because he is an orphan.



The AFT persistently compares the situation in charter schools with that of some mythical ideal school district.

Moreover, the AFT uses a remarkably static definition of accountability. It claims that charter schools are no more accountable than district schools since most states now have accountability plans. Unlike district schools, however, charter schools are actually *held accountable*. When a charter school fails to satisfy its parents and/or sponsors, it loses customers and *closes down*. While only 4 percent of charters have shut their doors, every operator of a charter school lives in fear of demise. By contrast, when a district school fails, school employees face the truly awful consequence, in most cases, of drafting so-called "school improvement" plans that promise long-term reform. They may even get more money and a raft of consultants to help them shape up. Once in a while more drastic measures will be taken, such as reconstituting the school with new staff, but the old staff is usually just shuffled around the district (the venerable tradition known as "passing the lemons"). Charter schools face market accountability. They either provide an education that attracts parents or they lose their enrollment and funding.

The AFT uses an equally peculiar definition of innovation. To the AFT, innovation seems to mean inventing something never before seen on Earth. This is akin to saying that Apple Computer in 1980 was not an innovative company since it did not invent computers; it merely made and marketed computers small enough for home use. By contrast, economists like Douglas Greer describe three types of innovation: inventing a new product or service; modifying it for public use; and disseminating it to the public. Charter schools have done a little of the first and a whole lot of the second and third types of innovation. For example, Montessori curricula were invented nearly a century ago, but remain too "innovative" for the vast majority of district schools. In the past, parents had to turn to expensive private schools if they liked the Montessori approach, but now many charter schools offer Montessori curricula in response to parental demand. (Notably, some district schools have established

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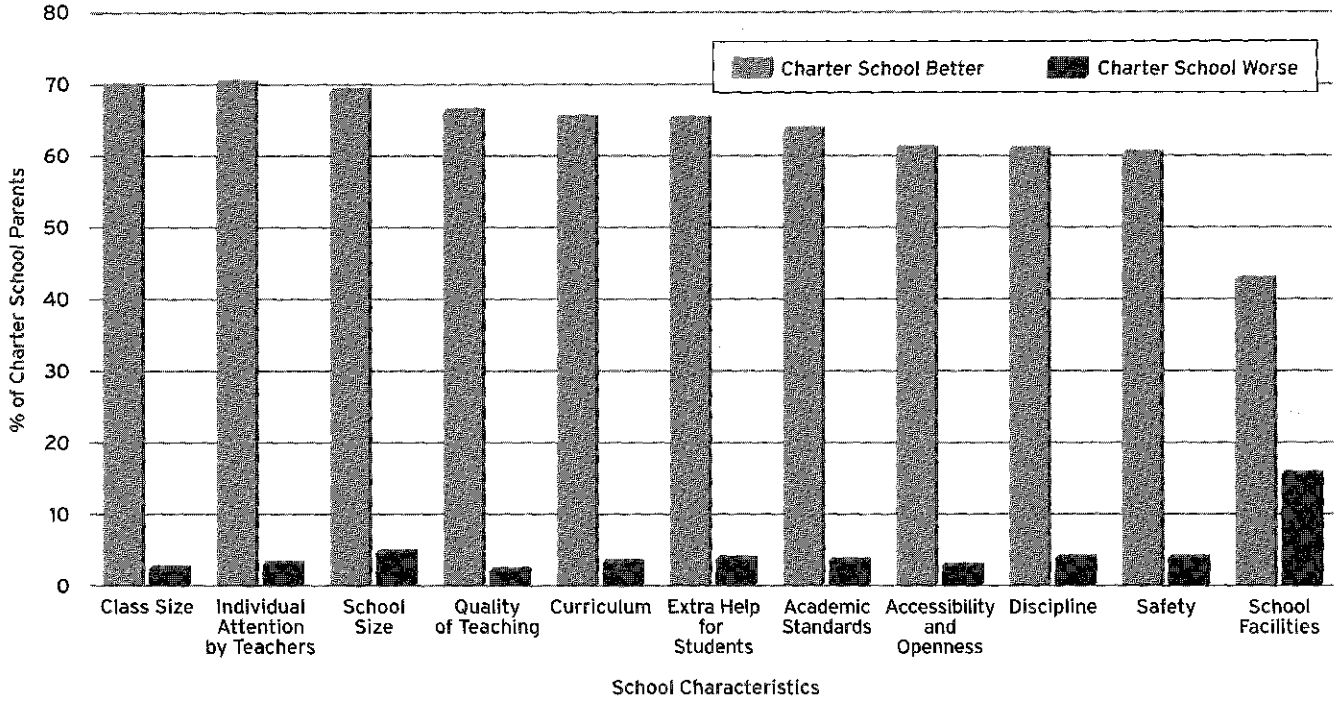
A Matter of Opinion (Figure 1)

The American Federation of Teachers' "study" of charter schools simply ignores the fact that parents rate their charter schools highly when compared with traditional public schools their children otherwise would have attended.



SOURCE: Chester E. Finn Jr., Bruno V. Manno, and Gregg Vanourek, *Charter Schools in Action* (2000)

Montessori programs to fend off competition from charters.) Similarly, the AFT claims that for-profit management companies "do not contribute to innovation because they offer a single, 'cookie-cutter' school design, curriculum, and technology package to all the schools they operate." But in the environment of public education, where successful programs are rarely studied and replicated, any company that manages to disseminate effective school designs and curricula to a large number of schools should be considered very innovative.

In my research I have identified 34 different examples of charter school innovation, including small size; untenured teachers; contracts with parents; real parent and teacher involvement in school governance; outcome- (rather than input-) based accreditation; service learning fully integrated into the curricula; unusual grade configurations; split sessions and extended school days and years to accommodate working students; and computer-assisted instruction for at-risk and other frequently absent students. It appears that most charter schools were founded to pursue one or more of these 34 innovations. Of course, the biggest innovation of all is inherent to charters: allowing parents to choose their children's schools or even start new schools.

The AFT is correct to point out that not all charter schools are innovative. Yet on the whole they seem much more innovative than district schools, which is after all the point. A few charter schools, such as Edupreneurship in Arizona, which uses a token economy in an open classroom setting to motivate students, seem to have invented new curricula. A few charters have invented new modes of school governance, such as the Charter School of Sedona, where master teachers control their classroom budgets, including their own salaries and those of their aides (whom they hire and fire). More typically, charter schools have refined and disseminated existing practices that district schools were reluctant to use—a nice service for parents who may not care whether a program is "innovative" as long as it works for their children.

Sins of Omission

When the AFT isn't using definitions convenient to its conclusions, it simply ignores information altogether. For instance, numerous surveys have found that students and parents who transferred from district schools to charter schools thought the charters were safer, friendlier, and more effective, often by margins of more than 50 percent (see Figure 1). For example, in a 1997 survey of charter school students who used to

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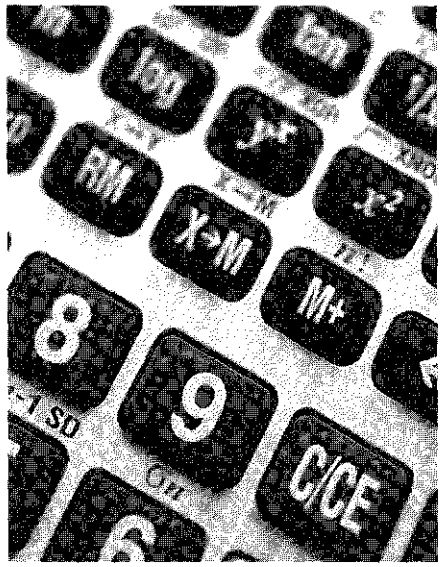
attend traditional public schools, 65 percent said their charter school teachers were better than their previous teachers. Only 6 percent rated charter teachers worse. This may explain why roughly seven out of ten charter schools have waiting lists. My own fieldwork suggests that older charter schools are particularly likely to be oversubscribed, based on their track records. The AFT apparently thinks that the opinions of parents and students just don't matter in evaluating charter schools. In fact, they cite with contempt the fact that in some instances "teachers, students, and parents successfully lobby to keep their charter school open" when authorizers attempt to shut them down, often for political rather than academic reasons.

The AFT's strategy of selective reporting also colors its approach to the question of whether competition from charter schools has forced changes in district schools. At the state level, teacher unions and school districts, when not opposing charter schools altogether, have lobbied intensively to place strict caps on the number of charter schools and to limit the number of institutions that can grant charters. (Now this stance, once the province of just local unions bent on protecting their monopolies, appears to have become national policy for the AFT.) In the 20 states where the AFT has succeeded in restricting the authority to grant charters to school districts, an average of 26 charter schools are open. The 18 states where other institutions, such as universities and local governments, can grant charters have an average of 96 schools. The AFT fails to note this in criticizing charter schools for not providing enough competitive pressures for district schools. In other words, the AFT chastises charter schools for a policy environment it played a major role in creating.

Where strong charter laws exist, as in Arizona and a few cities, considerable peer-reviewed research (not cited by the AFT) finds that districts do in fact respond to competition by working to



To the AFT, innovation seems to mean inventing something never before seen on Earth.

improve. As my team reported in *Small Districts in Big Trouble*, Arizona districts that lost a tenth to a third of their students to charter competition reacted with changes in leadership and curricula. In *School Choice in the Real World*, we reported that competition prompts districts to empower their teachers and increase outreach to parents.

Similarly, in *Revolution at the Margins*, Frederick Hess reports that limited competition had little impact, but the *threat* of serious competition from charter schools and vouchers in 1995–'96 led Milwaukee Public Schools to reform with Montessori options, decentralization, tougher graduation requirements, more transparent school report cards, advertising, and empowerment of their more innovative principals, who had previously been treated with contempt. A school board member supportive of the city's teacher union recalled, "It was choice and vouchers that encouraged the [school] board to pull together with the union to create innovative schools. Suddenly you had a union that said, 'Yeah, we like this idea, let's do it.'" After a court challenge blocked charter school expansion, the union and its allies "went back to their old ways." Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby's quantitative analyses suggest that competition from vouchers in Milwaukee and from charters in Michigan and Arizona have improved the test scores of all students, even those "left behind" in district schools.

When the AFT can't ignore the numbers, it just changes them. For instance, the AFT claims that Humboldt State professor Eric Rofes, in *How Are School Districts Responding to Charter Laws and Charter Schools?* found that only a quarter of district schools responded to competition from nearby charters. Actually, Rofes found that 48 percent of the districts exhibited moderate or high levels of response to charter school competition. He also found that districts that had lost funding to charters were particularly likely to respond, just as market theory predicts. This would seem to support arguments for more charter schools, not fewer.

Similarly, the AFT misstates the findings of a report by economists Michael Podgursky and Dale Ballou. The AFT claims that the authors found that charter schools determine pay "in a similar manner to most school districts," but Podgursky and Ballou in fact found charters far more likely to use merit pay and far less likely to use traditional salary schedules. Notably, while most teachers in traditional public schools are tenured and have multiyear contracts, 96 percent of charter teachers in their study were either at-will employees or had annual contracts; thus charters can and do separate ineffective teachers.

Likewise, the AFT says that about 8 percent of charter schools have closed, but this figure includes charter schools that never actually opened or that were consolidated into local school districts.

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In fact, as noted above, the Center for Education Reform reports that only about 4 percent of charter schools have closed, not a bad failure rate for a new program.

Finally, in an extremely muddled discussion, the AFT reports that charter school student-to-teacher ratios "generally match or exceed" those of their host districts. I find more credible the statistics from the U.S. Department of Education–sponsored report *The State of Charter Schools 2000* showing that charter schools have a median student-teacher ratio of 16 to 1, 7 percent lower than that of district schools.

Fiscal Irregularities

The AFT's misreporting of charter school finances may be more understandable, since school finance is less transparent than Enron's balance sheet. For example, the AFT first states, "Charter school salaries tend to be competitive with other public schools at the beginning-teacher salary level and less competitive for more experienced teachers." Yet later the AFT declares, "Charter school teachers are paid less than other public school teachers, particularly when their teaching experience and education are considered." Further on, the AFT reports that charter schools spend more on administration and less on instruction than traditional schools.

I suspect that the AFT's confused "findings" reflect three interrelated factors. First, the vast majority of charter schools are new schools. As such, the vast majority of charter school teachers have less than six years of teaching experience, typically less than half the average for nearby public schools. Since teacher salaries are the primary instructional expenses for schools, it should come as no surprise that charters spend less on classroom instruction than traditional public schools, whose teachers are older and thus further along on the salary schedule. My fieldwork and other surveys suggest that teachers who choose charter schools tend to be attracted by a school's curricula and mission. The more senior teachers who come to charter schools (often as a second career) are frequently willing to forgo higher salaries out of dedication to their school's mission. The AFT may find this difficult to believe, but many teachers are idealistic: they are willing to trade lower salaries for the in-kind benefit of working with a curriculum they believe in.

Second, as new and underfunded schools, charters must spend a higher than normal percentage of their resources on their buildings, leaving less money for salaries. Nearly all the operators of the 29 charter schools I've visited lamented facilities problems. Indeed, there is a long line of research on charter school facilities challenges. State legislatures have been reluctant to fund building programs, and charter schools, unlike school districts, can't float bonds to pay for capital spending.

Third, the finding that charter schools have more "administrators" than traditional schools ignores the fact that most charters are very small schools. The U.S. Department of Education reports that as of 1998–'99, the median charter school had 137 students, compared with 475 in all public schools. Many charter principals still teach, while principals at traditional public schools are a decade or more out of the classroom. Which sort of administrator is more likely to inspire the teaching staff?

A similar lack of context plagues the AFT's discussion of the makeup of student bodies in charter schools. The AFT claims that charter schools are more racially homogeneous than district schools, citing research that makes much of very small differences (normally less than 10 percent) between charter and nearby district school student bodies. What the AFT fails to acknowledge is that charter schools are more likely than district schools to promote integration, since in most charter schools white and minority kids take the same courses, while in many district schools minority kids are placed into nonacademic tracks.

The AFT also fails to present a sophisticated discussion of school market locations. Due to their problems with obtaining facilities, charter schools tend to locate in low-rent areas, while drawing students from miles around. This makes comparisons with the nearest district schools highly misleading. Scott Milliman and I found, after correcting for this and other errors, that one of the key studies cited by the AFT as alleging racial concentration in charter schools in fact found charter schools no more segregated than district schools, with the notable exception of those charters that had converted from private schools. Furthermore, findings that charter schools for at-risk students tend to have proportionately more minorities than district schools are no surprise, since proportionately more minority students are at risk. Nationally, charter schools are 52 percent nonwhite while district schools are 41 percent nonwhite, suggesting that on the whole charters are serving traditionally underserved populations.

Context is a major issue in the AFT's reporting on student achievement as well. The AFT correctly reports that most kids in charter schools seem to do about as well as in district schools, controlling for demographic factors. This is in fact less success than charter boosters predicted. The AFT fails to note, however, that most charters are very new schools; 14 percent of the nearly 2,400 charter schools operating in the 2001–'02 school year were in their first year, and another 23 percent were in their second year. As a result, the studies cited by the AFT compare many charter schools in their first or second year with district schools with decades of experience and deep pockets behind them. A wealth of scholarship suggests that first-year charters face serious start-up problems, particularly regarding curricula and personnel. As the RAND study of charter schools and vouchers, *Rhetoric Versus Reality*, argued, "Judging the long-term effectiveness of the char-

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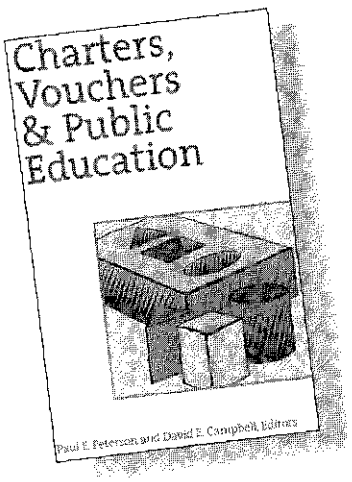

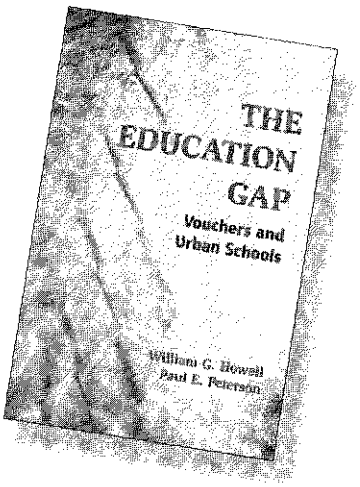

PUBLICATIONS:

The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools
William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson
with Patrick J. Wolf and David E. Campbell
Brookings Institution Press, 2002

Charters, Vouchers, and Public Education
Paul E. Peterson and David E. Campbell, editors
Brookings Institution Press, 2002

The Program on Education Policy and Governance
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Now that charter schools have grown to a point where they threaten the monopoly of unionized school districts, the AFT is changing its tune.

ter school movement based on outcomes of infant schools in their first two years of operation may be unfair, or at least premature." A more apt comparison would analyze charter schools in their third year or older. As it is, for the charters to be doing as well as traditional schools is nothing short of remarkable. Furthermore, many parents chose charters because their children were failing in district schools, meaning that charters have very challenging kids to teach.

The schizophrenic personalities of the teacher unions are on full display in *Do Charter Schools Measure Up?* A decade ago, the AFT is fond of telling us, the AFT claimed the mantle of reform by advocating charter schools as a way of promoting innovation and sidestepping administrative bureaucracy. But now that the charter school movement has grown to a point where it actually threatens the monopoly of unionized school districts and the salaries and perks of teachers, the AFT is changing its tune. This is unfortunate. As scholar Bruce Fuller points out, charter school proponents need "a devil's advocate, a loyal opposition," a role played by the RAND Corporation and by academics like Fuller himself. But whereas RAND calls for more experimentation so that more evidence can be gathered, the AFT, revealing its real purpose here, wants charter schools to be choked off in their infancy. The scary thing is how powerful their lobby can be. But so far, parents appear to be more powerful.

–Robert Maranto is an assistant professor of political science at Villanova University and associate scholar at the Goldwater Institute.

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Investment Planning

The role of resources in education

Education Matters: Selected Essays
Edward Elgar Publishing, 2001, $120; 512 pages
by Alan B. Krueger

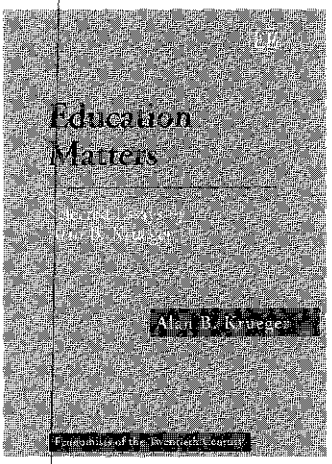
Reviewed by Derek Neal

Two opposing camps dominate contemporary discussions of how to improve America's schools. One identifies as the central problem the limited resources currently available, while the other contends that entirely new systems of school choice and accountability are needed to promote the efficient use of resources.

These issues are among those Princeton economist Alan Krueger addresses in *Education Matters*, a collection of influential essays on the economics of education. Krueger is among the most prominent academic researchers advocating an increase in resources within the existing system of public schooling.

In this regard, Krueger's essay on Tennessee's experiment in class-size reduction, reprinted from the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1999), stands out as one of his more important contributions. The STAR experiment, which ran from 1985 through 1989, involved more than 11,000 elementary-school children in 80 Tennessee public schools. Each school assigned students to one of three types of classrooms: 1) small classes, with enrollments of 13 to 17 children; 2) regular classes with 22 to 25 children; and 3) regular classes with 22 to 25 children and a full-time teacher's aide in the room. STAR is significant in that it is the only large-scale experiment in the United States involving the random assignment of students to classrooms of various sizes—a design rarely found in research on class size.

The results showed sizable jumps in achievement associated with the first



year in a small class, but only weak evidence that additional years in a small class further enhance achievement. These results contrast with the results of nonexperimental studies, which often find no benefit from reducing class size.

It is important to note that the STAR program did not generate perfect

The results indicated that better-funded schools are associated with higher returns from schooling.

data. Attrition rates from the study were high, and baseline test scores were not available. The experimental design was compromised on other dimensions as well. That said, Krueger does a good job of explaining the patterns in the data and placing the results in context.

Spending and Wages

Another set of papers, written with economist David Card, also finds positive relationships between education spending and economic outcomes, this time by focusing on the effect of expenditures on a person's earnings rather than test scores. The idea is that schooling imparts a range of skills that may not be revealed by standardized tests but will show up in students' later performance in the marketplace, a point that is certainly well taken.

Such analyses nonetheless confront a difficult statistical problem. Wages for workers of a given skill and occupation vary among different geographic labor markets. Thus levels of school spending may be correlated with wages for reasons that have nothing to do with individual skill levels.

Card and Krueger adopt a creative strategy in attempting to circumvent this dilemma. They examine how wages vary among people who currently reside in the same labor markets, but they look only at workers who live in a state other than the one in which they were born. Card and Krueger first measure the percentage increase in earnings associated with an additional year of schooling for each group of migrants who were born in the same state and in the same decade. They then examine the relationship between these rates of return to education attainment and the levels of school resources devoted to various cohorts born in a particular state. In a paper published originally in 1992 in the *Journal of Political Economy*, Card and Krueger report that the rate of return to an additional year of schooling was higher among men born between 1920 and 1949 in states that provided longer school terms, higher teacher salaries, and lower ratios of students to teachers.

However, a subsequent paper by economist James Heckman and his col-

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leagues raised doubts about the assumptions in Card and Krueger's empirical model. They showed that the Card and Krueger results were driven primarily by the high payoff of a college degree among students who attended elementary and secondary schools in states with high levels of school resources. The return to finishing high school was not higher among workers from states with well-funded high schools. I do not know exactly why this pattern of correlations emerges, but it does raise questions about the correct interpretation of Card and Krueger's results.

Using similar strategies, Card and Krueger also examined the relationship between black-white earnings differences and black-white differences in measured school quality. These analyses are particularly interesting because they cover time periods in which many southern states provided far more resources for white schools than for schools attended by black children. The analyses used earnings data from the 1960, 1970, and 1980 Census files as well as data on school inputs in 18 segregated states from 1915 to 1966. Card and Krueger pieced together data on term length, teacher pay, and student-teacher ratios from several sources and examined whether differences in school resources among states and within states over time help to explain the variation in black-white wage differences among adults born in different states.

One set of analyses involved only blacks born in southern states who moved to specific metropolitan areas in the North. The results indicated that better-funded schools are associated with higher returns from schooling. It is possible that these analyses were compromised by nonrandom patterns of migration. However, given the low rates of college completion among southern blacks during the period they looked at, I doubt that the earnings of college graduates contribute much to the results.

As a whole, the paper provides considerable evidence that, in many southern states, the practice of separate and unequal schooling for blacks and whites during the first half of this century contributed significantly to the economic deprivation of southern blacks. Furthermore, the overall improvement of black schooling relative to white schooling, even before the integration of schools in the 1960s, contributed to the economic progress of southern blacks. These results may not speak directly to current education policy debates because no group in our society attends schools that are as poorly funded as those attended by many southern blacks before the Civil Rights Movement. However, the results are a noteworthy addition to a significant literature that documents the historical role of education policy in denying opportunity to black Americans.

Off the Table

In his final chapter, originally written for a Federal Reserve Bank of New York conference, Krueger maintains that there is no immediate need for dramatic reforms in the school system. He writes:

> *My personal view is that policymakers should be risk-averse when it comes to changing public school systems. To alter the institutional structure of U.S. schools radically without sufficient evidence that the "reforms" would be successful is to put our children at risk. . . . careful experimentation and evaluation should proceed on a limited basis before wide-scale institutional changes are introduced, such as vouchers, magnet schools and charter schools.*

I'm sympathetic to Krueger's position that small experiments, evaluation, and incremental implementation are the prudent course with respect to school vouchers and related reforms. However, a similar argument can be made concerning reductions in class size, although Krueger generally treats reducing class size as a straightforward reform within the existing system of public schools. For example, in his paper on the STAR experiment Krueger argues that reducing class size by roughly seven students may be expected to enhance future earnings by an amount greater than or equal in present value to the current costs of smaller classes. Krueger admits that his calculations are rough and that it is hard to place a dollar value on the potential gains from reduced class sizes, but I am equally concerned that we do not really know how much it would cost to fund a large-scale reduction in class size while maintaining the current level of teacher quality.

Recent evaluations suggest that California schools did compromise teacher quality when they were forced to reduce class sizes dramatically in a short time period, and this result is expected. Good teaching requires skills that many people do not possess, and large-scale reductions in class size require large increases in the stock of teachers. Thus, significant reductions in class size cannot likely be accomplished over a short time horizon without compromising teacher quality. Furthermore, unless there is a much larger pool of potential elementary-school teachers than I imagine there is, a large expansion of the elementary-school teaching force would likely result in a long-run reduction in average teacher quality or require significant increases in salaries. Finally, given the wage schedules in public schools, any salary increases for elementary-school teachers would likely be enjoyed by secondary-school teachers as well, even if secondary-school class sizes remained unchanged.

As it stands, a thorough analysis of these issues would have nicely complemented Krueger's work on the STAR experiment and the other papers in *Education Matters*. Krueger's research provides some of the most credible evidence that small classes yield higher achievement, but more work is needed to demonstrate that the benefits of smaller classes outweigh the likely costs.

–Derek Neal is an associate professor of economics at the University of Chicago.

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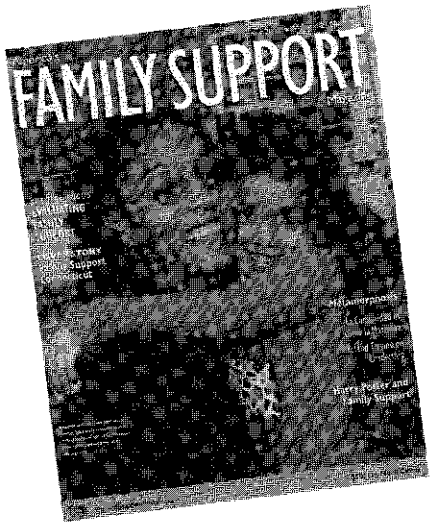

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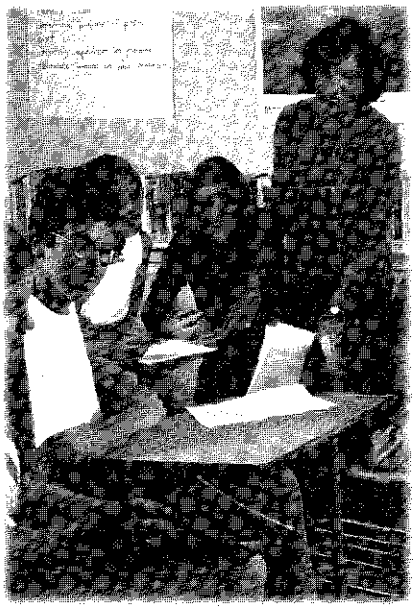
by CAROL JAGO

Much Ado About Something

Teaching students how to read the classics

Read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all," wrote Henry David Thoreau. Today most students, save those in honors English or elite private schools, read just a few classics in high school. Their English teachers, weary of pushing teenagers through 19th century novels, long ago replaced traditional works with more "reader friendly" texts. Consequently, we have a generation of students who never sailed the seas with Odysseus or threw the switch in Victor Frankenstein's laboratory.

Students weaned on the pace of MTV and video games had less and less patience for slow-moving plots and detailed, descriptive passages. In an attempt to reach this new audience, teachers brought contemporary and multicultural literature into their classrooms. This was not prima facie a bad thing. Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* are important books. Where we erred is in tampering with the criteria that we applied to literature. Instead of choosing books with literary merit—universal themes, rich language, complex characters—we selected simpler stories with characters to whom we thought our students could relate.



This might have worked had reading such high-interest, familiar stories led students to increasingly challenging works. But many teenagers, fed a diet of contemporary books, never take the next step. Not many teenagers can be depended on to reach for stories like Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* on their own. If we stop teaching students how to read McCullers, most will forever find this touching novel opaque.

Teenagers are hungry for stories that mirror their lives. In powerful young adult literature such as Walter Dean Myers's *Monster*, Francesca Lia Block's *Missing Angel Juan*, and Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, young readers meet characters whose problems reflect and illuminate their own.

Yet students also need books that are windows to other worlds. When teachers replace the "window" books in their curriculum—*Beowulf*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Red Badge of Courage*—with "mirror" books, reflection suffers. We underestimate our students' ability to make connections between Odysseus's heroic journey and their own personal odysseys. Students develop intellectually as great works of literature offer them a vicarious experience of the human condition far greater than any of them could ever acquire on the basis of luck and first-hand encounters. Students don't need a teacher to help them through the syntax and diction in a novel by Chris Crutcher or S.E. Hinton. The thoughtful teacher aims instruction just beyond what students are able to perform independently.

A generation of students has never sailed the seas with Odysseus.

As a high-school English teacher with a quarter century of experience, I recognize that it would be selfish folly to expect my students to spend years discovering what I labored to learn. My students are fascinated by Poe's parrot, his initial bird of choice for "The Raven." The 19-year-old Mary Shelley, writing Frankenstein on a dare, is a living person to them. Students see the logic in the progression from Walt Whitman to Allen Ginsberg to Charles Bukowski. Teachers must go beyond encouraging off-hand, initial responses from student readers, must push them to explore exactly what the author has done with syntax and diction that elicited such a response in them. Students often need examples of how others think about literature before they engage their own minds. Students need not be in awe of my interpretations or indeed in awe of any particular text. What I do expect is that they learn to read with care.

–Carol Jago teaches English at Santa Monica High and directs the California Reading and Literature Project at UCLA.

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